# China Soft Power Disadvantage

## Notes

**What does this file say?**

This disadvantages says that the aff strengthens US leadership in the Arctic, which is bad because it crowds out China’s ability to lead and gain “soft power” (the ability to influence others to get the outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or punishment). If China loses soft power, then the Chinese government is perceived as illegitimate. That perceived illegitimacy by leaders of the CCP regime mean that they will attempt to regain legitimacy by launching a “diversionary war” and invading Taiwan.

At the bottom of the file, there is a section for affirmative answers to this disadvantage.

**How to use this file if negative**

In the 1nc

You want to read the “1NC China Soft Power DA” header. If you are reading this disadvantage, you do need to read all 4 cards in the 1NC.

In the 2nc or 1nr

If you are extending this disadvantage, you need to directly respond to the arguments that the 2AC made against you. This file has cards under headers that start with “They Say:” that you can and should read. However, BEFORE you read the cards from a certain header, you should explain the 1NC evidence that makes that argument as well. So for instance, if the aff says “soft power isn’t key”, you will want to explain the 1nc evidence that talks about why soft power is important for regime legitimacy before reading the new cards.

In the 2nr

You should not be reading new evidence. You should be explaining the evidence that you read in the 1NC, 2NC, and 1NR.

**How to use this file if affirmative**

In the 2ac:

The “2AC Answers to: China Soft Power Disadvantage” header likely contains too many cards. Different affirmatives may choose to make a different combination of these arguments in the 2AC. You likely will not have time to read all of them, so you want to re-order these arguments to put the ones you think are stronger at the top so you ensure you read them.

In the 1ar:

In the 1ar, your primary job is explaining the 2ac arguments that you have read. There are some cards that are under “1AR Extend:” headers that you can read if you have extra time. But you should mostly focus on talking about the cards already read in the debate.

In the 2ar:

You should not be reading any new evidence. Instead, you should be explaining the cards you have already read earlier in the debate.

## China Soft Power Disadvantage

### 1NC China Soft Power DA

#### [First/next] off is the China Soft Power disadvantage

#### China will fill the leadership gap created by US withdrawal, but US commitment to the arctic crowds out Chinese soft power

Karim 25, Postdoctoral fellow at Yunnan Minzu University (Ejaz, 2-10-2025, “The Vacuum in Global Leadership in the Trump Era and Opportunities for China” https://www.wgi.world/the-vacuum-in-global-leadership-in-the-trump-era-and-opportunities-for-china/) wtk

Since the Cold War, a profound transformation in global politics has transpired during President Trump’s administration. His ‘America First’ policy, characterized by diplomatic withdrawal, economic protectionism, and skepticism towards multilateralism, eroded established alliances and diminished America’s status as a global leader.

Under President Trump’s administration, the United States is prioritizing narrow nationalism over international cooperation, as evidenced by the withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Paris Climate Accord, and closure of USAID, the United States Agency for International Development.

On the other hand, China seized the opportunity to position itself as a global leader and promote global development, economic diplomacy, and multilateralism. Beijing has substantially augmented its economic and geopolitical influence in recent years. China may occupy the gap created by America’s exit from international agreements and multilateralism via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), climate commitments, and strategic partnerships with developing nations.

Beijing is pursuing influence via soft power mechanisms such as trade agreements, development loans, infrastructure investments, cultural initiatives, and educational exchanges. On the contrary, the United States has historically emphasized military alliances and economic sanctions.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China’s most ambitious worldwide investment endeavor, was launched in 2013 and encompasses over 150 countries, funding infrastructure projects including ports, roadways, trains, and energy systems. Chinese-constructed initiatives have benefited several nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reinforcing Beijing’s economic dominance in these regions. Despite critics arguing that elevated interest rates and unclear loan conditions may ensnare developing nations in prolonged dependency, China’s loans attract these countries due to their generally fewer restrictions than those imposed by the IMF or World Bank.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, China used its ‘Health Silk Road’ initiative to distribute millions of vaccination doses worldwide. Despite skepticism regarding the vaccine’s efficacy among certain recipients, China’s swift response strengthened relationships with nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—many of which received no direct support from the U.S. throughout the crisis. China has enhanced its standing as a benevolent economic partner by providing debt relief to struggling economies such as Ethiopia, Zambia, and Pakistan.

When asked about the U.S exit from WHO, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun emphasized the agency’s “central and coordinating role in global health governance.” He added that, “China will, as always, support the WHO in fulfilling its responsibilities, deepening international cooperation in public health, strengthening global health governance and promoting the building of a community of human health”.

Secondly, climate diplomacy is China’s most persuasive assertion of global leadership. Following Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and retracting U.S. environmental regulations, China promptly endeavored to fill the leadership void.

China has significantly contributed to global decarbonization efforts, being the foremost producer of solar panels, wind turbines, and lithium-ion batteries. China has reinforced its dedication to sustainability by augmenting green energy investments in developing countries via the Belt and Road Initiative. China has pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, signifying long-term environmental objectives while being the largest carbon emitter globally. Nonetheless, given China’s continuous investment in coal-powered energy initiatives, skepticism remains over the authenticity of these commitments.

Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Guo Jia kun reiterated China’s concern about the U.S. withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. He said that “Climate change is a common challenge facing all mankind… “China’s determination and actions to actively respond to climate change are consistent.” He added.

Moreover, the burgeoning strategic cooperation between China and Russia is a significant facet of its rise. The Xi-Putin alliance has recently strengthened due to their mutual antagonism to Western hegemony. The video meeting between Xi and Putin, occurring within hours after Trump’s inauguration, signaled a coordinated challenge to the U.S.-led global order.

Their collaboration establishes the foundation of an emerging China-Russia bloc, encompassing energy agreements, joint military drills, and diplomatic support. Both nations reject the liberal international system led by the United States and advocate for a multipolar world order.

China’s economic objectives include achieving global leadership in technology. Beijing seeks to dominate critical areas such as telecommunications, semiconductor production, and artificial intelligence via its ‘Made in China 2025’ initiative.

China’s technological advancement is spearheaded by Huawei and Alibaba, challenging Western dominance in critical sectors. Beijing’s strategic focus on innovation and digital infrastructure is evident in the advancement of 5G networks and government-funded quantum computing research. Despite the United States’ attempts to impede China’s technological progress, China’s ongoing investments, despite trade restrictions and penalties, demonstrate its dedication to leading the fourth industrial revolution.

China’s growing participation in international organizations signifies its expanding power. China boosted its engagement with the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations (UN), while the Trump administration has withdrawn from international organizations.

Beijing has contested Western-dominated frameworks and advocates for alternative governance models. China’s status as a significant global financial power has been further reinforced by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a China-led alternative to the World Bank. Beijing’s enduring objective of reshaping the global order, to align with its interests, is underscored by its diplomatic strategy.

Moreover, China’s Arctic expansion signifies a substantial shift in geopolitics. Beijing has declared itself a ‘near-Arctic state’. It has invested in infrastructure projects in Greenland and Russia, prompted by the emergence of new trade routes resulting from melting ice caps. China has strategically prioritized the Arctic to dominate vital transportation routes and exploit untapped resources. The increasing influence of China in the region continues to alarm the United States and its allies, who perceive it as advancing Beijing’s broader geopolitical objectives.

A retreat of the Trump administration from global leadership may allow China to increase its influence through multilateral cooperation, economic diplomacy, climate commitment and technological investments.

While it remains uncertain whether the United States can regain its leadership status, Beijing is currently betting that actions have a greater impact than rhetoric, regardless of its deliberations. China’s rise to dominance, as a preeminent global force, appears increasingly secure as the world realigns its alliances and partnerships.

#### Chinese soft power is key to domestic legitimacy

Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira 22, \*Assistant Professor at Lusophone University of Porto, and Assistant Professor at University of Minho and researcher (post-doc) at the Research Center in Political Science, University of Minho, Ph.D. and a Master’s degree in Political and Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Louvain. \*\*Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Minho, Portugal. (\*Paulo Afonso B. Duarte, \*\*Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, 2022, “The Soft Power of China and the European Union in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Strategy” y, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 30:4 https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1916740) wtk

According to Chinese political elites, soft power has become ‘a crucial strategy for China to cultivate a benign international environment for its continued growth’ (Gao 2015, 7–8), thereby enabling the CCP to meet the domestic and external role expectations. At the domestic level, Chinese people expected the CCP to improve economic development and living standards, as well as fight against corruption. Externally speaking, role expectations linked to international community’s calls for a more responsible China. The President himself recognised the soft power’s potential when affirming that: ‘We should increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s message to the world’ (Cit. by Xinhuanet 2014, para.4). Furthermore, there is the assumption that soft power is a constitutive aspect of a ‘state’s international status and influence’, and a ‘tool for maintaining advantageous positions in international competition’ (Shambaugh 2015, 22). Interestingly, as the next section will highlight, the connection between the projection of soft power and the pursuit of a distinctive status in the international arena has been, for a long time, close to the heart of the EU.

#### Legitimacy shortfalls cause China to attack Taiwan.

Blumenthal 20, \*JD, MA, director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. \*\*Masters Student at Georgetown University and research specialist at a technology consultancy. (\*Dan and \*\*Jakob Urda, 9-28-2020, "China's Aggressive Tactics Aim to Bolster the Communist Party's Legitimacy," American Enterprise Institute, https://www.aei.org/articles/chinas-aggressive-tactics-aim-to-bolster-the-communist-partys-legitimacy/)

Yet for the CCP, external aggression is a necessary tool to combat internal weakness. The CCP is obsessed with its fragilities, such as the threat of losing popular support and legitimacy and demands for more justice and freedoms. When Chinese people criticize their government, China must act more aggressively abroad. Beijing uses external aggression to fan Chinese nationalism and cast the CCP as the protector of the people and champion of a new era of Chinese glory.

Coronavirus was a true moment of weakness for the CCP, as it exposed fissures in China’s overcentralized authoritarian political system to light. A now-infamous example of Chinese paranoia over potentially out-of-control domestic crises was the case of Dr. Li Wenliang. On February 7, Li, a doctor who warned of the coronavirus but was quickly censored by the Wuhan police, died from the virus himself. Li’s death quickly became the top trending topic on Chinese social media with hashtags such as “We want freedom of speech.” The CCP censored all mentions of Li or any coronavirus failings, fearing more organized protests. Simultaneously, the coronavirus battered China’s economic growth, which underpins the CCP’s claim to legitimacy, with an unprecedented 6.8 percent Q1 contraction.

Far from the unified front which Beijing seeks to project, the coronavirus revealed the CCP’s dysfunction. For example, Dali, a midsize city, intercepted and distributed a shipment of surgical masks headed to the hard-hit municipality of Chongqing. Similarly, the City of Qingdao instructed customs officials to hold on to a shipment of masks and medical products headed to Shenyang. At the same time, Hong Kong dealt the CCP a major political embarrassment when it halted traffic coming in from the mainland. These reports demonstrate the government’s inability to enforce basic order among competing cities and provinces.

In response to the tumult caused by the coronavirus crisis, the CCP mobilized popular support by reigniting conflicts with its neighbors. On April 2, during the peak of the coronavirus, a Chinese maritime security vessel sank a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Parcel islands. Just two weeks later on April 16, China escalated a month’s long standoff with Malaysia by deploying the coast guard to a disputed oil shelf. China also stepped up its military activities targeting Taiwan—who’s coronavirus response was strong and effective—with as many as three incursions in a single week in June. These episodes were widely condemned by the international community, but greeted with nationalist revelry at home.

The need to project strength and unity domestically explains the timing of China’s border dispute with India. In May, violent brawls broke out between Chinese and Indian soldiers near Sikkim. On June 15, the Indian government reported that twenty Indian soldiers were killed by Chinese soldiers in the Galwan River Valley, a disputed border region controlled by India but claimed by China.

The CCP has made full use of the crisis to rally nationalism. China’s foreign ministry issued statements blaming India for the clashes and state-propaganda popularized the slogan “China is not afraid.” The Global Times, a propaganda outlet, cast the clashes as an Indian invasion, saying “India has illegally constructed defense facilities across the border into Chinese territory in the Galwan Valley region.” Importantly, Chinese state-owned news outlets were also running news about India’s poor coronavirus response at the time, in contrast to its own “successes.”

The recent border clashes mirror China’s 2017 standoff with India at Doklam, a strategic point near Bhutan. During the conflict, Foreign Minister Wang Yi made statements that cast the conflict as an Indian attack upon China, and state media circulated images from the 1962 Sino-Indian War, to remind the China populace that Beijing had defeated Delhi before. The India clashes coincided with another threat to CCP legitimacy: a fight to remove pro-democracy advocates from the Hong Kong Legislative Council. China ended up harshly cracking down on the supposedly autonomous city as well.

Understanding China’s weaknesses is essential for policymakers attempting to make sense of its aggression. This dynamic is not only a Xi Jinping phenomenon: China’s modern history shows that domestic crises are often followed by belligerence. A study that pre-dated Xi’s rule, with a dataset of over three thousand interactions between the United States and China, found that the CCP was twice as likely to initiate disputes when the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE) experienced a substantial drop. The SSE is a barometer of elite sentiment in China because the government pledges to protect elite investments and uses SSE listings to reward party insiders.

Insight into the CCP’s domestic political objectives helps determine the magnitude of the conflict and appropriate response. The editor of the Global Times wrote that a belligerent foreign policy was “necessary to satisfy the Chinese people.” Policymakers can use history to deduce what levels of aggression are “necessary” for the CCP’s goals. In India, it is unlikely that clashes will escalate into invasion because the current skirmishes satisfy the CCP’s purpose of bolstering legitimacy.

However, Taiwan may be in particular danger from China’s reactionary aggression. This is because the ways in which conflict with Taiwan would bolster the CCP’s legitimacy align more closely with more violent coercion—reunification is a core element of the CCP’s platform and Taiwan’s clear success fighting the coronavirus is a major blow to Beijing’s legitimacy. Because Taiwan’s “threat” to the CCP stems from its mere existence, it is particularly vulnerable to reactionary aggression. Xi is a self-proclaimed follower of Mao. So, the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis is a powerful example; Mao needed to generate support for the great leap forward and deflect criticism from poor economic growth. To stir the nation, Mao seized islands controlled by Taiwan and threatened an invasion of the country until restrained by American nuclear brinksmanship.

#### Nuclear war. It’s on the brink and underestimated.

Khan 24, PhD, chair of international history and diplomacy at Tufts University’s Fletcher School. (Sulmaan, “China and the U.S. Are Numb to the Real Risk of War: The pair are dangerously close to the edge of nuclear war over Taiwan—again.,” Foreign Policy, https://archive.ph/J8LHf#selection-3053.0-3059.76) [Language edited]

Beijing and Washington have become desensitized to the risk these circumstances pose. But in the militarization of foreign policy and the failure to grasp the full significance of that militarization, the pair are one accident and a bad decision removed from a catastrophic war. Mathematicians speak of the “edge of chaos”: the final point separating order from doom. A system operating at this edge has no room for error. This is where the accumulated weight of the past has brought the United States, China, and Taiwan. They walked right up to the edge of a war that could go nuclear several times in the past: in 1954-55, 1958, and 1996. Now, they seem to be living on that edge permanently.

In recent years, China’s policy has alienated Taiwan completely. As China has bullied, threatened, and displayed force at home and abroad, it has made unification unacceptable to much of the Taiwanese electorate. And it has enjoyed only mixed success in trying to isolate Taiwan diplomatically. It has managed to buy off many of Taiwan’s erstwhile allies, but its conduct over COVID-19 and support for Russia despite the invasion of Ukraine have cost it friends, too—and those former friends have turned to the island across the strait.

Since at least 2021, Taiwan has had a seemingly endless parade of visitors, from Germany’s education minister to Liz Truss, the former U.K. prime minister. In November 2021, the European Parliament sent its first official delegation to the island; the head of the delegation, Raphaël Glucksmann, told Tsai, “We in Europe are also confronted with interference from authoritarian regimes and we came here to learn from you.” In October 2022, Tsai received lawmakers from Lithuania and Ukraine; the former had recently established a representative office in Taiwan despite Beijing’s anger, while the latter was making a gesture of solidarity with a country that, unlike China, had been sharp in its criticism of Moscow. A Japanese parliamentary delegation that arrived in December 2022 spoke glowingly of Tsai’s defense plans and emphasized Japan’s own determination to keep the status quo in the region from being “changed by force or unilaterally.” China has warned against or condemned many of these visits.

Beijing has only itself to blame for Taiwan’s strengthened diplomatic position. Its wolf warrior nationalism and reluctance to break with Moscow have cost it European support. If visits from foreign politicians were to translate into condemnation of China at the United Nations, Beijing could veto a Security Council resolution. In this case, like Russia, China would find itself a pariah state—and unlike Russia, China cares about how it is seen by the world. China’s own corrosive nationalism has eaten into its body politic, too. It has not torn itself apart in a bout of political bloodletting, but it has certainly let loose the kind of jingoism that would allow that to happen. What it will decide to do in a crisis is uncertain. Beijing itself does not know.

The United States, meanwhile, seems intent on reviving a defense treaty with Taipei that it once spent more than a decade trying to break. Taiwan has become a means of showing China just how tough the United States can get. Washington is not clear on how getting tough will alter Beijing’s conduct, but “deterrence” is the concept invoked most often. A show of force, the thinking goes, will deter China from aggression. But what if deterrence fails? What if the show of force backs China into a corner from which it feels it has no option but to lash out? To this, Washington has few answers beyond preparing for war.

Some U.S. pundits have waxed lyrical about how they would fight a war with China. Taiwan, they opined, will be turned into a “porcupine” with hardened defenses. One former defense official suggested the use of “low-yield tactical nuclear weapons” in the event of a conflict with China. (The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki qualify as low yield.) The possibility of Russian President Vladimir Putin using such weapons sent shock waves of horror through the world, but the idea of employing them in a war with China became normal in some circles. There was no guarantee that, once the nuclear taboo was breached, the weapons would stay “low yield.” But the question of what would happen if the two powers escalated to higher-yield arms and plunged the world into nuclear holocaust has been left unresolved.

It is as though the United States is being haunted by all the ghosts of its long past with China and Taiwan, forcing it to relive questions it had once thought resolved. U.S. military leader Douglas MacArthur wanted to wage war against China in 1950. President Dwight D. Eisenhower considered using nuclear weapons against China in 1955 and 1958. Today, Washington abides by the “One China” principle, but it wants Taiwan to enjoy “self-determination.” It vows that it does not dispute the formulation that Taiwan is a part of China, but it will help Taiwan resist Chinese coercion. It wishes to promote Taiwan’s presence in international organizations, but it remains unwilling to recognize Taiwan itself. The United States has shifted from pure ambiguity to ambiguity with a tilt in favor of Taiwan—and it has done so because it decided China is an enemy.

Like China, the United States is mired in jingoism and confusion. Like China, it has no idea what it would do if things go wrong. With the 2024 U.S. presidential election heating up, the one thing every candidate, Democrat or Republican, has done is to show how tough they could get on China. Republicans vying for the nomination got in on the act early; former President Donald Trump has denounced French President Emmanuel Macron for “kissing Xi’s ass,” referring to Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Joe Biden, with the power of the incumbent, has not stopped at rhetoric. Whether supporting a TikTok ban unless the app is sold or calling for increased tariffs on Chinese goods, his policies are calibrated to demonstrate toughness on China.

Taiwan’s own presidential elections, held on Jan. 13, showed just how deeply the island’s electorate had turned against unification. At first, William Lai, the candidate from Tsai’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), vowed not to alter the status quo, though he accused Beijing of doing so. Taiwan, he argued, was already sovereign. There was no need to change what worked. But his caution soon vanished. While campaigning, Lai defined success for Taiwan as its leaders being able to visit the White House. This was a gauntlet thrown down—Taiwanese officials are blocked from visiting Washington. The Biden administration immediately demanded an explanation. This was not, U.S. officials made clear, how the relationship worked. Where Tsai had been prudent, Lai was willing to push his luck.

The Kuomintang (KMT), the main opposition party, was not leaning toward Beijing, either. Its nominee, Hou You-yi, the mayor of New Taipei City, said that he would reject both “one country, two systems” and a formal move for independence, but that if Taiwan were attacked, he would face the challenge. Taiwan, according to Hou, needed to be ready to defend itself. On the crucial question of how to deal with China, there was little difference between the policies Lai and Hou espoused.

A third candidate, Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People’s Party, was calculatedly vague on China policy. His campaign made clear that he was depending on votes from traditional KMT supporters: those who would have favored a closer relationship with China. He claimed that he would find the middle ground between the KMT’s appeasement of China and the DPP’s provocation of it; he would make Taiwan a bridge for Sino-American communication rather than a front in a Sino-American war. How he proposed to do all this was left undefined.

Lai eventually won the presidency, but it was not the ringing triumph Tsai had won four years earlier. Lai scraped through with a mere 40 percent of the vote, his victory made easier by the fact that Hou and Ko had failed to join forces. As he prepares to take office on May 20, Lai faces a deeply divided, volatile populace and a legislature in which the DPP is bereft of a majority.

This is a point China has been quick to underline. The DPP, it huffed after the election, is not representative of “majority public opinion.” What is lost on Beijing is that the other candidates made clear that unification was not something they were willing to countenance either. Hou had made a point of not inviting Ma Ying-jeou, the last KMT member to serve as Taiwan’s president, to his rallies; he knew that to associate himself with Ma’s embrace of China would have doomed his candidacy. Beijing still does not understand Taiwan. Meanwhile, the United States continues to disavow support for Taiwanese independence while making plans for further delegations to the island. With the U.S. presidential election going into fifth gear, the risk of miscalculation will only rise.

At the edge of chaos, a single choice can make the difference between order and catastrophe. More than 80 years on from the Cairo Declaration, which held that Taiwan would be “restored to the Republic of China” at the end of World War II, we can see that there were myriad moments that could have yielded different outcomes, for better or for worse. If President Franklin D. Roosevelt had insisted on self-determination for Taiwan after World War II, if the Korean War had not happened, if Beijing had made “one country, two systems” work, if Taiwan had developed a nuclear weapon, if Pelosi’s plane had indeed been shot at—if someone had made a different decision at any of those moments, the world would be a radically different place.

When deterrence, toughness, and pride drive policy, the room for error diminishes to virtually nil. China, Taiwan, and the United States are at a point where the choices they make could spell the difference between peace and nuclear [devastation] holocaust. Those choices are best made with the historical record—and all its unrealized possibilities—firmly in mind.

### They Say: “US Soft Power Irrecoverable”

#### Chinese soft power isn’t inevitable BUT is growing in response to US retreat

Bi 25, award-winning journalist and current affairs commentator with a doctoral degree in communication studies and a master’s degree in international studies. (Jianlu, 3-11-2025, “Soft Power Divide: China Advances While U.S. Retreats” *Foreign Policy in Focus,* https://fpif.org/soft-power-divide-china-advances-while-u-s-retreats/) wtk

However, China’s soft power ascent is not without its challenges. Criticisms from certain Western political figures and media regarding human rights, censorship, and intellectual property protection present a persistent challenge to its global image. Furthermore, while China’s cultural exports and digital platforms have achieved considerable traction among younger demographics, questions remain about their ability to cultivate deeper, enduring influence across diverse populations.

Despite these challenges, China’s soft power is undeniably growing. Its ability to leverage its cultural, technological, and diplomatic assets has positioned it as a major player in the global arena. As the United States appears to be withdrawing from its traditional role of global leadership, China is poised to fill the perceived vacuum, shaping the international landscape in its own image.

#### US soft power decline could be reversed if they engage in better diplomacy

Weinstein 25, deputy director of the Middle East Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. (Adam, 6-11-2025, “Trump Is Blowing Up Soft Power” https://www.thenation.com/article/world/trump-diplomacy-power-aid-development/#google\_vignette) wtk

Some of President Trump’s instincts on diplomacy offer a welcome jolt to Washington’s overly technocratic culture. In a town where diplomacy is often sterile, procedural, and overly cautious, Trump’s unvarnished bluntness and willingness to meet adversaries without preconditions can feel refreshingly direct and human. It unsettles the Beltway but sometimes resonates abroad.

Dissolving USAID, shuttering research institutions, and sidelining the State Department will not streamline diplomacy. By tying America’s diplomacy exclusively to the persona of the president, the Trump administration is hollowing it out.

This path is not irreversible. The administration can cut or refocus programs it finds too soft, too ideological, or too costly—without burning down the architecture of American soft diplomacy. A deal-making, business-minded White House should see value in continuing to attract the world’s future political and economic leaders, not drive them away mid-degree and leave them with a lasting grievance. President Trump has made similar points in the past—tweeting, “When foreigners attend our great colleges & want to stay in the US, they should not be thrown out of our country,” and suggesting during his last campaign that foreign students should even be granted permanent work authorization.

### They Say: “Not Zero Sum”

#### China will fill US leadership gaps through investment and cooperation

Keohane and Nye 25, \*Professor Emeritus of International Affairs at Princeton University and an Associate at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. \*\*University Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. (\*Robert O. Keohane, \*\*Joseph S. Nye Jr., 6-2-2025, “The End of the Long American Century” https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/end-long-american-century-trump-keohane-nye) wtk

For its part, China is striving to fill any gaps that Trump creates. It sees itself as the leader of the so-called global South. It aims to displace the American order of international alliances and institutions. Its Belt and Road infrastructure investment program is designed not only to attract other countries but also to provide hard economic power. More countries have China as their largest trading partner than have the United States as such. If Trump thinks he can compete with China while weakening trust among American allies, asserting imperial aspirations, destroying the U.S. Agency for International Development, challenging the rule of law at home, and withdrawing from UN agencies, he is likely to be disappointed.

#### Even a perceived vacuum encourages Chinese leadership

Bi 25, award-winning journalist and current affairs commentator with a doctoral degree in communication studies and a master’s degree in international studies. (Jianlu, 3-11-2025, “Soft Power Divide: China Advances While U.S. Retreats” *Foreign Policy in Focus,* https://fpif.org/soft-power-divide-china-advances-while-u-s-retreats/) wtk

Furthermore, China’s proactive diplomacy and its engagement in multilateral institutions have enhanced its international standing. Its Belt and Road Initiative, while facing criticism for the so-called debt traps, has provided infrastructure development and economic opportunities to numerous countries, particularly in the developing world. China’s contributions to peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid efforts have further solidified its image as a responsible global actor.

The timing of China’s soft power ascent is particularly significant. As the United States appears to be retreating from its traditional role of global leadership, China is stepping forward to fill the perceived vacuum. Trump’s “America First” rhetoric, his withdrawal from international agreements, and his imposition of trade tariffs have alienated allies and created uncertainty in the international system.

This perceived decline in U.S. soft power is creating opportunities for China to expand its influence. U.S. cultural dominance, once unquestioned, is facing increasing competition from Chinese cultural products and digital platforms. The U.S. emphasis on unilateralism and its skepticism towards multilateral institutions contrast sharply with China’s rhetoric of cooperation and shared prosperity.

#### Soft power is zero sum—China will undoubtedly try to fill leadership gaps

Wallin 25, the American Security Project’s Chief Executive Officer, a member of its board of directors, and has led ASP’s research on public diplomacy and strategic communications since 2011. Masters in Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California. (Matthew Wallin, 3-21-2025, “The United States is Deliberately Sabotaging its Image Abroad by Gutting USAGM” https://www.americansecurityproject.org/the-united-states-is-deliberately-sabotaging-its-image-abroad-by-gutting-usagm/) wtk

This is, of course, just the latest in a deliberate effort to disarm America’s soft power capabilities and sabotage its image abroad. Russia, China, and Iran are engaged in a massive international effort to make the world safe for autocracy, and the United States just decided to disband its most effective forces against this endeavor. With the destruction of USAID, and the Congress’ refusal to stand up for the budget that it previously approved to support its vital mission, it’s as if China had succeeded in convincing the U.S. government to surrender all its best tools for commanding respect, goodwill, and influence abroad. Meanwhile, China continues to seed and cultivate its own influence through the Belt and Road, all while America looks the other way.

America’s soft power is what makes it different from its adversaries. Rather than coercing, cajoling, and corrupting countries around the world, American foreign policy should be based on attracting, asking, and advising. The United States should attract because there is inherent good and value in our system and working with the United States is preferable to falling prey to authoritarian interests. Asking (not telling) signals respect to those our country wishes to influence—by listening and demonstrating that the U.S. genuinely values them as partners, we create lower-risk environments that build life-long trade and security relationships. By advising, we offer our own expertise to improving quality of life and governance abroad, instilling American values to create partnerships that ultimately make the world a safer and more secure place. The alternative is infinitely more expensive and deadly—just ask Russia.

As our country engages in the rapid unscheduled disassembly of its own institutions with a mix of glee, apathy, and horror, critics of the old status quo will state that these organizations were full of waste, fraud, and abuse. Most Americans agree that it is absolutely worth analyzing these organizations for effectiveness and efficiency. Unfortunately, the current approach by the administration and DOGE appears hell-bent on throwing out all the good with the bad, completely disregarding the measurable influence and impact these agencies have had in benefiting the United States and its foreign policy objectives. While no organization is perfect, and certainly examples of misused funding are documented, that’s when you hire trained professionals to help improve the organization instead of committing arson.

China, Russia, and Iran will undoubtedly seize the opportunity to fill the vacuum, and our lawmakers should be appalled by the speed at which the United States is actively dismantling its most historically effective means of establishing goodwill abroad and respect for the United States. They should stand up for these proud institutions of American soft power, but instead the champagne is flowing in Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran. The question is, why is America pouring the drinks?

### They Say: “China Fails in the Arctic”

#### China can build Arctic capacity through soft power

Pezard and Tingstad 25, \*associate research department director, Defense and Political Sciences, and a senior political scientist at RAND. \*\*adjunct senior researcher at RAND. (\*Stephanie Pezard, \*\*Abbie Tingstad, 2-6-2025, “Is the Polar Silk Road a Highway or Is It at an Impasse? China's Arctic Policy Seven Years On” https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/02/is-the-polar-silk-road-a-highway-or-is-it-at-an-impasse.html) wtk

China sees the Arctic not as a strategic priority, but rather as a long-term investment. While many of its Arctic ambitions remain unfulfilled at this point, it is slowly building up its capacities to operate in a region where few can do so and is using all tools of soft power—from economic investments to science diplomacy—to establish itself as a legitimate Arctic stakeholder. The United States needs more than ever its Arctic allies to closely monitor the vast and changing Arctic environment, push back on Chinese activities of concern, and maintain a regional governance system that China is hoping to change some day to its benefit.

#### China has plenty of opportunities to grow its influence

Andersson 24, analyst at the Swedish National China Centre. (Patrik, 6-13-2024, “The recent backlash against China in the Nordic Arctic: Prospects for future Chinese engagement in the region” Swedish National China Centre Brief No. 5 2024, downloaded from https://kinacentrum.se/en/publications/the-recent-backlash-against-china-in-the-nordic-arctic-prospects-for-future-chinese-engagement-in-the-region/) wtk

While Chinese investments in infrastructure and mining in the Arctic may face growing limitations, the potential for Chinese-Nordic collaboration in the Arctic remains, especially in non-security domains. Investment screenings are unlikely to prevent all Chinese investment in “strategic” sectors. Recent Chinese investments in the battery sector in Finland and Sweden, while not in the Arctic, underscore the challenges of reducing reliance on Chinese investment, despite the EU’s “de-risking” policy.

Nordic collaboration with China in Arctic governance is likely to continue and has potential benefits if carefully managed and monitored. The absence of a single comprehensive treaty governing Arctic affairs means that the current framework is a patchwork of international agreements, forums and mechanisms, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UN Fish Stock Convention and the Svalbard Treaty.64

China still has observer status in the Arctic Council, the primary intergovernmental forum for discussing environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic, consisting of representatives from the eight Arctic states and indigenous peoples. While lacking voting rights, China is entitled to participate in meetings, contribute to the work of the Council’s various working groups and propose projects through any of the eight member states.65 The Council suspended activities in early March 2022, however, following a collective decision by seven of the eight member states.66 This has left the future of the council uncertain.

While there appears to be support among Nordic participants for keeping China engaged in some aspects of Arctic governance, in particular environmental governance, Nordic states should stay vigilant against any attempts by China to modify Arctic governance mechanisms. Chinese experts have consistently criticized these mechanisms as fragmented, outdated and discriminatory against non-Arctic states, although they rarely voice these concerns to international audiences.67 Nonetheless, if China adheres to established regulations and norms of Arctic governance, its participation could contribute to mitigating environmental risks and improving maritime safety in the Arctic, while potentially diluting the growing alliance between China and Russia in the region.

Arctic shipping is another area where there appears to be potential for continued cooperation between China and the Nordic states. China’s COSCO Shipping, one of the largest shipping companies in the world, possesses the largest fleet capable of navigating the Arctic shipping lanes.68 China continues to be regarded as a preferred partner among some actors in the Nordic shipping industry.69

### They Say: “Soft Power isn’t Key”

#### Soft power is key to defuse threats to CCP legitimacy – unites different factions and strengthens core values

Sayama 16, Visiting Fellow in the International Security Studies group at RUSI, Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies (Osamu, “China’s Approach to Soft Power Seeking a Balance between Nationalism, Legitimacy and International Influence,” https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201603\_op\_chinas\_soft\_power.pdf)

As China’s rapid economic development has continued, economic inequality has widened between its rich coastal cities and the poor rural interior. There is a risk that anger and frustration among the poor might turn to hostility towards the authority and legitimacy of China’s rulers. In this context, Beijing wants to use the elements of Chinese soft power to promote national pride and the confidence of the whole population. Beijing also wants to promote socialist thought and to unite the Chinese people in commitment to the CCP and the People’s Liberation Army. According to the Chinese academic Zhang Guozuo, ‘The US sees soft power as an important way of implementing hegemony and power politics. But China sees the improvement of cultural soft power as an important way of strengthening comprehensive national power and international influence’. He also argues that, ‘internally, soft power can strengthen socialist core values, improve China’s excellent traditional culture, cultivate noble thought and morality, and strengthen all-Party, all-military, and all-people’s unity’.23 This suggests that China intends to encourage domestic stability through its soft-power strategy and to head off any possibility of multiparty democracy.

#### Specifically, influence in the Arctic is key to China’s global legitimacy

Barich 22, Master of Public Policy degree in global public policy with a concentration in United States foreign and international security policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, Field Artillery officer in the Active Guard Reserve program for the Minnesota Army National Guard. (Captain Christopher Barich, 10-3-2022, “The Three-Fold Path of the Snow Dragon: China’s Influence Operations in the Arctic” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3171142/the-three-fold-path-of-the-snow-dragon-chinas-influence-operations-in-the-arctic/) wtk

China’s three warfares strategy represents a tool meant to facilitate global Sino ambitions through specialized regional application, including the Arctic. Beijing’s fundamental position on its need to be an equal governance actor in the Arctic exists through its global equities (great-power access) and concerns (climate-change impacts). Chinese global and Arctic legitimacy cannot be separated according to the regime, which presents advantageous geopolitical circumstances for China. China’s ability to effectively compete in various sectors throughout the world allows Beijing to set conditions for additional influence that is often difficult to contest. For example, the PSR policy involving the Arctic is largely an extension of the multiregional BRI.

The three warfares strategy is most pronounced in the geopolitical arena, by penetrating bilateral and multilateral institutions, governance regimes, and decision making to facilitate positive legal, psychological, and public opinion effects to set conditions for China’s long-term strategic objectives in the Arctic. Since 2013, Beijing has increased China’s participation in Arctic affairs and governance as an observer to the Arctic Council; as a partner in the Arctic Circle Forum, hosting the organization’s annual assembly in Shanghai in 2019; as a member of the Arctic Economic Council; as chair of the Pacific Arctic Group, organized under the International Arctic Science Committee; as a full member of the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum; and through China’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council.26 China’s engagement in organizations, inside and outside the Arctic region, facilitates the building of bilateral and multilateral relationships that provide opportunities for generating influence and political power.27 In 2018, the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (the CAO agreement) was negotiated and implemented among the Arctic coastal states of Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States and non-Arctic states with distant-water fishing capacity, China, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, and South Korea, aligning with Chinese policy positions and preferences outlined in China’s Arctic Policy white paper. The CAO agreement is an example of legal warfare setting conditions for future operations in the Arctic with psychological and public opinion effects enabling those future operations. China’s participation and ratification of the CAO agreement consolidated Beijing’s long-term position in Arctic fisheries regimes and prevented restrictions on Chinese marine scientific research, while nurturing its environmental profile and strengthening perceptions of China as a power that can legitimately pursue scientific advance in the Arctic.28

Additionally, China gains leverage as a responsible fisheries actor in the Arctic for the purposes of offsetting and/or distracting from other contested regions. At the very least, China establishes the official position of the state, which allows Beijing to maintain a position that Chinese-involved illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing violations are a substate actor issue. China’s membership to the agreement yields other three warfares benefits, too. Through a multitude of working groups, task forces, and expert groups, Beijing is able to conduct influence operations targeting the bilateral and multilateral decision-making regimes that have positive psychological and public opinion effects that promote China’s near-Arctic state narrative, legitimize the PRC’s participation in Arctic affairs as an important stakeholder, and shape the policy discussions to achieve Chinese interests.29 As far as Chinese society is concerned (public opinion), the regime is successfully fulling its duties as required by the self-proclaimed Middle Kingdom. Contrary to popular (Western) belief, most Chinese are generally satisfied with the geopolitical performance of Beijing. The Arctic regional pursuits of China—geopolitically—continue to fit within the larger national sentiment also. Lastly, China’s strongest psychological warfare component geopolitically manifests through its consistent use of “peace” overtones involving its interests.30 Such a premise presents difficulties for competitors to respond with counternarratives—by design. For the Arctic and its notable characteristic of cooperation, China’s “peaceful” pursuits could be particularly problematic for the West.

#### Chinese soft power is key to regime legitimacy.

Edney 15, Lecturer in Politics and International Relations of China in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. (Kingsley, “Building National Cohesion and Domestic Legitimacy: A Regime Security Approach to Soft Power in China,” *Politics*, 25.3-4)

The need to overcome the security dilemma by reducing the fear its rise provokes in others is one of China's most complex national security challenges and the most widely cited reason for the country wanting to increase its soft power. According to Li (2009, p. 31), soft power is ‘primarily utilized to refute the “China threat” thesis, facilitate a better understanding of China's domestic socio-economic reality, and persuade the outside world to accept and support China's rise’. Deng (2009, p. 64) argues that in China the concept of soft power ‘to a large extent, means the ability to influence others in world politics with the goal of achieving great power status without sparking fully fledged traditional power politics of hostile balancing or war’. In his analysis of the concept's role in China's rise, Ding (2010, p. 266) argues that the country's soft power strategy is one of reassurance that helps ‘to deal with foreign challenges and create a friendly international environment’. Rawnsley (2012, p. 126) notes that China's soft power strategy has been prompted by the emergence of a ‘China threat’ discourse in the West and therefore China's soft power can be seen as ‘not only reactive, but defensive’. Nye also claims that its soft power strategy is intended ‘to make its hard power look less threatening to its neighbors’ and that soft power can help to reduce the effectiveness of regional coalitions that attempt to balance against China (Nye, 2011, p. 23; 2013). This kind of national security perspective helps explain why building soft power has become such an important task for the CCP. But we need to consider the possibility that domestic concerns over regime security are also driving China's soft power project.

‘Regime security’ generally refers to ‘the condition where governing elites are secure from violent challenges to their rule’ (Jackson, 2010, p. 187). In China's case, however, the insecurity of the regime is generated by the possibility not only of violent challenges, but also of ‘peaceful evolution’ (heping yanbian), which is an extremely seriously concern for the CCP, particularly following the ‘color revolutions’ that have occurred in some post-Soviet states (see Shambaugh, 2008, pp. 88–89). The ‘regime’ can be defined as ‘the small state of persons who hold the highest offices … and/or are the elite that effectively command the machinery, especially the coercive forces, of the state’ (Job, 1992, p. 15). While this article uses the term ‘regime security’ rather than ‘state security’, it should be noted that there is often no clear dividing line between the two within a ‘state-embedded polity’ (Gilley, 2006, p. 501) such as China, where there is significant penetration of the state by the CCP. Despite China's successes in dealing with many of the common sources of insecurity for developing states, such as permeability by external actors and susceptibility to armed conflict (see Ayoob, 1995, p. 15), two important sources of regime insecurity remain problematic for the authorities: lack of legitimacy and lack of national cohesion.

For a political authority such as the CCP, legitimacy is determined by the degree to which it ‘holds and exercises political power with legality, justification and consent from the standpoint of all of its citizens’ (Gilley, 2009, p. 11). In other words, the use of power must proceed according to rules, these rules are justified by widely shared beliefs and the actions of those in subordinate positions provide evidence that they consent to the power relationship (Beetham, 1991, p. 16). There has been a great deal of elite discussion of party legitimacy in China, particularly since the early 2000s; one study showed that 68 per cent of sampled Chinese journal articles about legitimacy took the view that the CCP's legitimacy was under threat, while 30 per cent claimed the party faced a legitimacy crisis (Gilley and Holbig, 2009, p. 343). A more recent study found that Chinese intellectuals are more pessimistic about regime legitimacy in China than their Western counterparts (Zeng, 2014). For the purpose of this article it is not necessary to resolve the question of whether or not the CCP currently faces a legitimacy crisis, however – only to show that the potential for the party-state to lose its legitimacy is a serious source of insecurity.

The Fourth Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, held in October 2014, provides clear evidence that senior party officials are highly concerned about the legality of CCP power. The Plenum's major focus was the need for the party to ‘rule according to the law’ (yi fa zhi guo) and pointed out that ‘good law is a prerequisite for good governance’ and that for the party to rule according to the law it must first rule according to the constitution (Xinhua, 2014). Responsibility for the justification of party power falls on the Central Propaganda Department, which utilizes a comprehensive network of institutions to attempt to reproduce the official discourse justifying CCP rule and suppress any rival discourses that might challenge it (see Edney, 2014). Lack of consent is also a problem that requires significant resources to overcome. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in recent years the annual number of major protests in China has exceeded 100,000 (Huang, 2012). While all states use domestic force to some extent (see Buzan, 1983, p. 67), the huge investment of the Chinese authorities in the internal security apparatus, which in recent years has exceeded even China's military spending (Martina, 2014), demonstrates that the lack of consent to CCP rule is widespread enough to be a cause for serious concern.

Soft power is primarily relevant to the enhancement of regime legitimacy where a significant component of the moral justification for maintaining the current system is based on the regime's ability to improve the international status of the national unit. The international increase in positive attraction that is associated with a rise in soft power makes it easier for the regime to convince its citizens of the truth of its claim that the country's international status is improving under its leadership, where ‘status’ is defined not only in terms of material capabilities, but also in terms of social recognition. For the most part, evidence of an increase in international recognition and attraction could be used to bolster claims that the regime has successfully improved the country's international status, regardless of whether soft power is a result of attraction to political values, culture or foreign policies, or whether it is generated by the policies of the regime or sources within broader society. Some internationally attractive cultural products can also be the work of dissidents or relate to aspects of culture or values that the regime would rather suppress, however, and these sources of attraction are difficult for the authorities to exploit.

Chinese political elites feel a keen sense of obligation to restore the country's past great power status (Deng, 2008, pp. 8–9) and show its people that China is globally respected and admired (Zhang, 2012, p. 620). The leadership attempts to appease domestic nationalist audiences by gaining ‘face’ for China abroad (Gries, 2004, pp. 120–121) and the party-state has often publicized statements of support or admiration from foreign allies to demonstrate China's international status and thereby bolster its moral claim to rule (e.g. Brady, 2003, p. 228). If there is a broad-based growth in Chinese soft power, these statements are likely to become more common and more credible as the number and variety of foreign actors who are attracted to China increases. Moreover, international attraction to China's success in areas such as economic development expands the number of ‘nodes’ in networks of ‘legitimacy belief’, thereby reducing the marginal cost of persuasion and squeezing out alternative discourses that might challenge regime legitimacy (Gerschewski, 2013, pp. 26–27). This makes it easier for the CCP to claim legitimacy based on its success in moving China toward the shared goal of national ‘rejuvenation’.

Although ‘national cohesion’ is a concept that is rather nebulous and difficult to assess, the regular references to ‘cohesion’ in official CCP statements indicate that Chinese leaders are worried about it and seek to improve it (e.g. CCP Central Committee, 2011; 2013). As China has become a more plural society, generating social consensus (ningju gongshi) and unifying the people (ningju renxin) have become serious concerns for the propaganda authorities (Edney, 2014). According to propaganda chief Liu Yunshan, achieving the ‘China dream’ of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires cultural cohesion (Xinhua, 2013), while an early article on national cultural security published on a CCP website argues that if a country lacks cohesion – even if it is strong in terms of other forms of power – when it faces challenges such as a natural disaster or foreign invasion it will ‘collapse at the first blow’ (bu kan yi ji) (Yang, 2006). A lack of national cohesion can be a persistent problem for weak states that are unable to generate ‘a domestic political and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate the large-scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation’ (Buzan, 1983, p. 67).

Normally soft power refers to a country's attractiveness to foreign constituencies. To consider the possibility that it could enhance national cohesion, however, it is necessary to apply the concept to the relationship between domestic constituencies. In this sense, the soft power of the political, social and cultural core of the polity encourages domestic interest groups and individuals on the margins to want the same outcomes, such as stability and national cohesion, as the authorities at the center. Although this might seem to be a major step away from the traditional interpretation of soft power, Nye's (2011, pp. 19–20) argument that soft power is a key requirement of an effective counter-insurgency strategy and that dealing with the threat of terrorism requires the soft power of an appealing narrative that can win over mainstream society and prevent terrorists recruiting new members to their groups, highlights the concept's potential significance for state efforts to respond to domestic sources of instability. In this case, soft power involves enhancing regime security by making it less likely that domestic adversaries who pose a threat to national cohesion will be able to obtain material support from the local population, which then makes it easier for the state to deal with the security threat they pose.

The authorities in Beijing face a range of threats to national cohesion from peripheral regions, including the ongoing problem of terrorism and insurgent attacks in Xinjiang, protests and discontent in Tibet, pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and de facto independence in Taiwan. In light of these challenges it would not be unreasonable for scholars, or even the authorities, to interpret ‘soft power’ as something that could also be applied to improve regime security by enhancing the cohesion between the political, social and cultural core of the Chinese polity and those on the margins. Indeed, in more general terms, Wang and Lu (2008, p. 427) have pointed out that Chinese interpretations of soft power include ‘the ability to generate compliance in a society by moral example and persuasion’.

### They Say: “Leadership Turn”

#### Overwhelming empirics prove China is committed to the existing order

Zhao 25, Professor and Director of the Center for China-US Cooperation, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. (Suisheng Zhao, 5-12-2025, “The Collapse of the US-led World Order: China Gains Ground but Not Ready to Replace It” https://theasanforum.org/the-collapse-of-the-us-led-world-order-china-gains-ground-but-not-ready-to-replace-it/) wtk

Not Ready to Remake the World Order

China has gained more ground from Trump’s retreat to defend its values and interests. However, China remains a revisionist stakeholder and is not ready to remake the world order. Trump’s “America First” and self-centered unilateralism have demonstrated all the hallmarks of a revisionist state, making it far easier for China to be seen as a responsible stakeholder in the world order. Distinguishing itself from Trump’s unilateralism that has thrown quite chaos and has torn away the very bedrock of the postwar order under which, for all its faults, China and many other countries have prospered mightily, China has continued to promote multilateralism as it interpreted and position itself as the global ballast and institution-builder by pledging to continue supporting the WTO and UN, honoring the Paris Accord and other international treaties and working together with other countries to address global challenges.

China has launched new initiatives and institutions, but they do not amount to replacing the existing order. Some commentaries expressed fear that China would use the BRICS, BRI, and AIIB to create alternative rules for its narrow interests. However, none of them has even been close to that end. For example, the Beijing-led AIIB has not become a blatant agent of Chinese foreign policy but a multilateral development institution. The AIIB modeled the governance structure and standards of established multilateral lending institutions, engaged former officials from these institutions to help craft policies, and pledged "lean, clean, and green." Emphasizing transparency, accountability, openness, and independence, AIIB adopted international norms and standards in line with the practices of established institutions in environment, society, disclosure, procurement, debt sustainability, and oversight mechanisms.

As part of the postwar order, not apart from it as was the Soviet Union, China holds a stake in maintaining the order that allows it to pursue its agenda within the existing international institutional framework—freed up to do so by the United States’ new spoiler role. This role is won by default, not by taking leadership in supplying regional and global public goods—let alone collaborating with partners, such as the United States did in the years after World War 2, to wrap itself in multilaterally negotiated rules.37

#### China doesn’t promote authoritarianism

Lantz 25, Lawyer with an LLM from Uppsala University, specializing in Human Rights and Migration Law, and Procedure and Arbitration Law. (Adam Lantz, 4-18-2025, “Time to End US Hegemony?” https://medium.com/the-new-climate/time-to-end-us-hegemony-922d690ead11) wtk

This alternative approach raises questions about political legitimacy as well. Western commentators often claim that Chinese people support their government only out of fear. But research like the Anthropology of Democracy (AoD) project — recently shared by Jason Hickel — challenges that assumption. Using anonymised, bias-reducing survey methods, the study finds that Chinese citizens express exceptionally high levels of satisfaction with their government and its responsiveness. If fear alone were the driver, we’d expect similar results in other authoritarian states — but we don’t. For example, only 50% of Russians in the same survey said they believed their country was democratic.

Many people struggle with the idea that China could be seen as democratic at all. But this rests on a narrow, Western definition of democracy — one that focuses exclusively on multi-party elections. China, by contrast, frames its system as “whole-process people’s democracy,” grounded in a unique party system and democratic centralism, local elections, and mechanisms for policy consultation and feedback. While different in form, the system seeks to institutionalise responsiveness to popular needs.

Whether or not one agrees with that framework, what matters is how it functions in the eyes of the people. In much of the West, citizens increasingly feel alienated from political institutions and disillusioned with the ability of electoral systems to deliver meaningful change. In China, people overwhelmingly believe their government acts in the interest of the majority. That perception — regardless of system design — may be a more important indicator of democratic legitimacy than ballots alone.

#### Chinese leadership is more peaceful

Lantz 25, Lawyer with an LLM from Uppsala University, specializing in Human Rights and Migration Law, and Procedure and Arbitration Law. (Adam Lantz, 4-18-2025, “Time to End US Hegemony?” https://medium.com/the-new-climate/time-to-end-us-hegemony-922d690ead11) wtk

Nesrine Malik offers a powerful and clear-eyed perspective in her recent piece, “It is difficult to imagine a post-American world. But imagine it we must.” She doesn’t shy away from the discomfort such a shift entails, but instead leans into it with honesty and vision. Malik writes:

“Ironically, this all might be the beginning of a process that leads to genuine ‘liberation days’ for other countries, but not the US itself. There is pain ahead, but also a sort of independence.”

Malik exposes the long-standing myth of American exceptionalism, reminding us that what the U.S. has long defined as “peace and prosperity” was in fact a version crafted to serve its own interests, imposed through power and propaganda. Malik’s call to imagine otherwise is not only necessary; it is liberating and essential.

It’s well-documented (or should be) that since the 1950s, the U.S. has actively overthrown governments in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Iran in 1953. Guatemala in 1954. Indonesia in 1965. Chile in 1973. The list goes on. The aim? To install regimes that protect U.S. corporate and strategic interests and keep trade flowing in dollars.

When violent coups and wars became too costly — or too unpopular — the strategy shifted to economic warfare. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank began offering “help” in the form of structural adjustment programs: austerity, deregulation, privatisation, and forced trade liberalisation. These policies devastated local economies, dismantled public sectors, and locked countries into cycles of debt and dependency.

This is the world system we live in today — and one that continues to uphold inequality, exploitation, and neocolonial power relations.

What about China?

It’s difficult to talk about U.S. hegemony without bringing China into the conversation. Much of the narrative around China’s growing economic influence frames it as an aggressive takeover — but that analysis misses a crucial point: the foundation for China’s expanding market share was laid by decades of U.S.-led neoliberal policies.

Under the banner of free markets and deregulation, the U.S. pushed for the liberalisation of global trade, the offshoring of industrial capacity, and the privatisation of critical infrastructure across the world. This global restructuring, driven by profit maximization and minimal state intervention, hollowed out domestic industries and weakened democratic control over strategic sectors.

As a result, Chinese companies — backed by a more state-coordinated economic strategy — have stepped into the void. From telecommunications to green tech, they are not simply “invading” markets; they are capitalising on the very system the U.S. helped build and enforce.

These developments didn’t happen in a vacuum. They are the result of decades of neoliberal policy: deregulation, privatisation, and a market-first ideology driven by the U.S. and its institutional allies — the IMF, EU, and World Bank. So if we’re alarmed by China acquiring ports or power grids, we should also ask: why is that even possible in the first place? Through U.S. imposed neoliberalism.

Let’s be clear: China is no utopia. But its rise has disrupted the dominant Western narrative of how development must work and who it must serve.

China’s political system does have problems and internal contradictions that must be overcome and labour conditions can be harsh, and the treatment of ethnic minorities remains a serious concern. But at the same time, it’s impossible to ignore the scale of China’s achievements: a country of nearly 1.4 billion people that has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty, expanded access to housing, healthcare, and education, and built infrastructure at an unprecedented pace.

These transformations are rooted not in free-market capitalism, but in a state-led model shaped by China’s revolutionary socialist foundations — which is to be celebrated.

That matters — because it challenges Western assumptions about what development must look like, and who it must serve.

The difference between socialist and capitalist systems matters profoundly especially when assessing poverty. Socialist policies often keep the cost of meeting basic needs low in ways that conventional price-based poverty measures don’t capture. This was the case in China. Before the market reforms of the 1980s and ’90s, the government provided food, housing, and basic services at little to no cost. In that context, US$1.90 (extreme poverty) a day stretched much further in China than in comparable capitalist countries. Research shows that over the past 40 years the numbers of people in China living in extreme poverty fell by almost 800 million.

A few researchers analysed OECD data and came to the conclusion that extreme poverty was lower in China than in countries like India, Indonesia, and Brazil during the 1980s. China consistently outperformed these countries on life expectancy, infant and child mortality, average years of schooling, and access to electricity.

The researcher’s acknowledges that extreme poverty is difficult to measure with precision. But the overall picture suggests that China’s transition toward market liberalisation may have worsened poverty temporarily. To combat this China government made state-led efforts in recent decades which reversed those trends. The government has since invested heavily in poverty alleviation, housing, and public services, reaffirming its commitment to some of its foundational goals.

As China’s global power has grown, so too has the debate around what kind of hegemon it may become. Unlike the U.S., China does not maintain hundreds of military bases, nor has it relied on drone warfare or regime change to project influence. Instead, it exerts power through trade, infrastructure, and economic diplomacy — most notably through the Belt and Road Initiative. This is still power, still strategic, still potentially coercive — but it signals a shift from military domination to economic interdependence.

### They Say: “No Taiwan War”

#### China will attack Taiwan if it has to divert attention from collapsing legitimacy

Zhang 21, MPA, Cornell Institute of Public Affairs; research assistant at the Department of Government, Cornell (Zhenyu, Spring 2021, "How Beijing Uses Diversionary Nationalism to Manage Social Movements," Yale Journal of International Affairs 16, pg. 81-82, https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/yaljoina16&i=74)

It is reasonable to speculate that Beijing employed diversionary behavior in 2019 to distract from possible instability in three important pillars of Beijing's legitimacy: a growing economy, social stability, and nationalism. Partially due to the trade conflicts with the United States, China's economic growth dropped to the lowest level since 1992, and its Gross Domestic Product's growth in 2019 was only 6.11 percent, compared with 7.43 percent in 2014.25 Meanwhile, Beijing also initiated a "crackdown on gang crime" movement in China that started in early 2018. This was a part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) effort to strengthen its legitimacy.26 However, this campaign against gang crime also put pressure on the local government to maintain social stability. Furthermore, 2019 was the thirtieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square incident, which is a highly sensitive issue in mainland China. It would be dangerous for Beijing if this infamous incident resonated with the social movements in Hong Kong or stimulated dissatisfaction or protests in mainland China. Therefore, to avoid potential unrest due to other issues and divert public attention away from them, stimulating nationalism is a wise and easy way for Beijing to manipulate public opinion.

If the diversionary nationalism tactic really works, then we may expect a "rally around the flag" sentiment to emerge. Based on social identity theory, international conflicts lead to a strong feeling of in-group and out-group contrasts, where people are more in favor of in-group members.27 This support of in-group members leads to support for the political leader of this group. For instance, Russian President Vladimir Putin's support rose dramatically after Russia's seizure of Crimea, U.S. President Frankdin Roosevelt gained a 12 percent increase in approval after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and U.S. President George W. Bush gained a 39 percent increase after the 9/11 attacks. 28 Moreover, conflicts are great opportunities for leaders to prove their leadership power and competence. When leaders display unjustified behavior or fail, it is common for those leaders to revitalize public support through promoting international conflicts.29

The survey results from my 160-person sample indicate that there is a strong nationalist sentiment among young Chinese citizens and that the overemphasis on foreign intervention and violence, which presumably leads to nationalist emotions, does arouse greater support for Beijing and its leaders.

Support for Beijing, which reflects the "rally around the flag effect," also rose after the protests. In total, 87 of the 156 respondents(55.77 percent) claimed rising confidence in the CCP.30 Only 9.62 percent of respondents had less confidence. Notably, 34.62 percent of the respondents felt no different before and after this movement. In terms of support for leaders, four of the respondents did not answer this question due to the potential risks: some of them said, "I have to say yes, right?" This may have resulted in biased answers for these two questions. In total 47.37 percent of the respondents agreed that they have more confidence in their leaders, whereas 13.81 percent disagreed. This is slightly less supportive than the support for the party.

#### Xi will launch a war to distract CCP Elites

Weiss 22, PhD, Professor of Government @ Cornell. (Jessica Chen, *et al*, “Provocation, Public Opinion, and International Disputes: Evidence from China,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 66, Issue 2, p. 4-5)

Provocation in an Authoritarian Context: China

The phenomenon of provocation does not appear to be unique to any particular regime type, with both democratic and authoritarian leaders publicly condemning or warning against foreign “provocations.” For instance, US officials told Chinese leaders that “We would consider an ADIZ [in the South China Sea] … a provocative and destabilizing act which would automatically raise tensions” (Reuters Staff 2016). The South Korean President Lee Myung-bak ordered plans to attack a North Korean missile base upon “any indication of further provocation” (Lee 2010).

Since most militarized conflicts involve at least one nondemocracy, it is important to understand whether and what kinds of foreign actions are likely to provoke public pressure for tough action in an authoritarian context. Monitoring and responding to public sentiment have become increasingly critical to authoritarian leaders, who fear that popular unrest may trigger elite splits or even ouster from office. Since the end of the Cold War, elite coups have been eclipsed by popular protests as the modal means of ousting nondemocratic leaders (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz 2014). Formally, the risk of incurring popular wrath may impose a “revolution constraint” on the policies that authoritarian leaders are willing to adopt (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 120). As President Xi explained to visiting dignitaries from Taiwan: “The Communist Party would be overthrown by the people if the pro-independence issue was not dealt with” (Zhuang 2016). Even if authoritarian elites do not fear popular revolt, public dissatisfaction may embolden regime insiders to oppose or challenge the leadership in an attempt to reclaim popular legitimacy (Shirk 2007; Svolik 2012, 12; Wallace 2013). The apparent importance of public support in China was evident in Xi’s statement to the Central Committee that “Winning or losing public support is an issue that concerns the CPC’s survival or extinction” (Xinhua 2013).

Given its fears of losing popular support and emboldening elite dissent, the Chinese government has invested in monitoring and responding to public sentiment and demands (Manion 2015; Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; Truex 2016; Meng, Pan, and Yang 2017). Even without electoral accountability, “local service institutions in China are comparably responsive to similar institutions in democracies” (Distelhorst and Hou 2017, 1024). Chinese officials do not risk punishment at the polls, but they may still adjust policies to respond to or anticipate citizen demands, reducing risks of collective action and elite challenges.9

We focus on the attitudes and reactions of citizens in China for two reasons. First, Chinese foreign policy has substantive importance. If a new great power war occurs, there is a good chance that it would be over sovereignty and maritime issues in the Asia-Pacific (Allison 2015). Second, despite many differences in size, power, and history, Chinese reactions to international crises can help us understand the incentives and pressures that other authoritarian states face, just as scholars studying US foreign policy can shed light on democratic behavior in international relations.

Do foreign actions actually “hurt the feelings” of the Chinese public, increasing popular indignation, resolve, and disapproval of the government if it fails to stand tough? Chinese diplomats claim to receive unsolicited mail from citizens containing calcium pills, an implied demand to “show more backbone in standing up against the United States” (Shirk 2007, 101). At least some foreign officials have pointed to the pressure that public opinion exerts on Chinese foreign policy. As the former Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg notes with Michael O’Hanlon, “In China, rising national pride and memories of past humiliations put increased pressure on leaders not to compromise with foreigners, including Americans … The Communist Party is especially susceptible to these pressures, given its dependence on nationalist credentials” (Steinberg and O’Hanlon 2014, 25).

#### Taiwan crisis goes nuclear because there are multiple vectors of escalation.

Kroenig 23, vice president and senior director of the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and the Atlantic Council’s director of studies, tenured professor of government and foreign service at Georgetown University (Matthew, “Deliberate Nuclear Use in a War Over Taiwan: Scenarios and Considerations for the United States,” Atlantic Council, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Kroenig-Deliberate-Nuclear-Use-in-a-War-over-Taiwan.pdf)

In the event of a US-China war over Taiwan, there are plausible scenarios in which either China or the United States would logically consider using nuclear weapons in a limited fashion, given the high stakes. Limited nuclear use is defined as a nuclear attack short of a large-scale nuclear exchange designed to eliminate a large fraction of an adversary state’s military forces, industrial production, or population. This section will lay out the plausible scenarios for either side’s deliberate nuclear use across the spectrum of employment—from signaling to an attack on an operationally relevant target to an extended nuclear exchange.

Scenarios for Chinese Limited Nuclear First Use

There are at least four scenarios for Chinese limited nuclear first use in a conflict with the United States over Taiwan: nuclear signaling and threats, a nuclear demonstration with no military effect, a nuclear attack on Taiwan, or a nuclear attack on the forces or territory of the United States or one or more of its regional allies.

Some might respond that these scenarios are implausible, given China’s pledge not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict, but there are reasons to doubt China’s stated policy. In fact, China’s nuclear strategy plausibly permits a variety of nuclear uses, and the country unequivocally possesses the capability to conduct a nuclear first strike. Moreover, US statements and documents cast doubt on China’s no-first-use policy.20 In addition, policy can change in the midst of a crisis or conflict, and there is technically nothing about China’s nuclear command and control that would prohibit first use. The United States must plan against this possibility.

Signaling

In a crisis or a conflict over Taiwan, Chinese leadership might use nuclear signaling to stop or limit a US intervention. This signaling could take a variety of forms. Chinese leadership or state media could issue threats—vague or specific, public or private—that warn of “catastrophic consequences” for the United States if it interfered with Chinese “internal matters.” The Chinese military could visibly alert its nuclear forces, including by dispatching mobile missiles from garrison, dispersing bombers to different airfields, and perhaps even releasing warheads from central storage to operational units. China could also test its nuclear delivery vehicles. This could be through a routine test like an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch in its western test ranges. China could perhaps also test a new capability, like its August 2021 test of a boost-glide hypersonic missile with fractional orbital bombardment capability, which reportedly took US defense officials by surprise and was “very close” to a “Sputnik moment” in the words of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley.21 Perhaps interpreting Russian nuclear threats against Ukraine as successful in dissuading direct US and NATO intervention, China could believe that raising the salience of nuclear weapons would deter the United States and its allies from joining the war on Taiwan’s side.

Demonstration

The Chinese military could conduct a nuclear demonstration. It could take a step up from nuclear signaling by actually detonating a nuclear device without having direct military effects. The least provocative demonstration would be a test at an existing Chinese test range. China has not conducted a nuclear weapons test since its 1996 signature of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which it has not ratified. The purpose of such a test would aim to convince Taiwanese, US, and allied governments and publics of China’s seriousness about the conflict and its willingness to escalate to nuclear use. A more provocative nuclear demonstration could occur above the waters surrounding Taiwan or perhaps even above international waters in the vicinity of a US military base in the Western Pacific.

Nuclear Attack on Taiwan

A nuclear attack against Taiwan itself could target Taiwanese military or leadership facilities—possibly before the United States has committed troops to Taiwan’s defense—as a gambit to collapse Taiwan’s defenses, decapitate its leadership, and deter the United States and its allies from supporting Taiwan. In recent years, experts have recommended that Taiwan transform its military into a distributed force capable of a “porcupine defense” less vulnerable to air and missile bombardment. Still, there are significant Taiwanese military facilities (air bases, ports, and army bases) or naval vessels that might present attractive targets for a nuclear attack. The Chinese military could use nuclear weapons to strike some of these facilities with minimal collateral damage to the Taiwanese populace or economy. By contrast, China could also consider a decapitating nuclear strike against Taiwanese national leadership in Taipei or against Taiwanese continuity-of-government locations. The goal of these attacks would be, first, to collapse Taiwanese government and, second, to signal to the Taiwanese population and the wider world that China is willing to escalate to the highest levels to achieve its goal of conquering Taiwan. A strike against an urban center would bring especially grave diplomatic and reputational repercussions for China and damage the postwar value of Taiwan to Beijing.

In either instance, a nuclear strike could be carried out before the United States or other countries had committed forces to the conflict, presenting those nations with the difficult choice of declaring war on a China that had already demonstrated its willingness to use nuclear weapons to prevail.

Nuclear Attack on US Forces, Allies, or Territory

Territory China could use nuclear weapons against US or allied forces or territory if it judged that nuclear use could confer a significant advantage.

If the United States and its allies and partners did decide to come to the aid of Taiwan with military force, China could elect to use nuclear weapons in a limited way against US or allied forces, US military facilities on the territory of allies engaged in the fight, or even US territory. Targets for nuclear use could include US or allied forces in the region, such as US carrier strike groups or surface action groups. A Chinese response might also include attacks on US military facilities located on the territory of allies, such as Kadena Air Base located on Okinawa, Japan. Finally, such a strike could target US military facilities on US territory, most notably Andersen Air Force Base (AFB) on Guam. Even if the United States or its allies had not yet declared their intent to support Taiwan against a Chinese invasion with military force, Chinese leadership could still decide that such intervention was likely and decide to engage in nuclear use early, motivated by the possibility of significantly reducing the capacity of the United States or its allies to intervene in the conflict. Nuclear use before a declaration of war could possibly be more useful to China if US or allied forces were not yet alerted or dispersed.

In addition to this warfighting logic, a Chinese decision to use nuclear weapons against US forces could be motivated by a desire to avoid defeat: If Chinese leadership believed that it was losing a conventional war over Taiwan, it might seek to escalate to nuclear use in hopes of compelling negotiations for a settlement—a similar logic to the Russian “escalate-to-de-escalate” strategy.22

Additionally, it is possible (though, of these possibilities, least likely), that Chinese leadership might believe, due to escalation in a conventional war, that US nuclear use may be likely and imminent. In that scenario, the CCP could decide that a preemptive, large-scale nuclear strike on the US homeland is necessary. This seems especially unlikely given the ultimate escalatory nature of this action and the reality that China does not—and will very likely not for the next five to ten years—possess a strategic force capable of a successful counterforce strike on the US nuclear triad. The United States will likely retain a robust second-strike capability in that time period. Such an attack, therefore, would likely result in a destructive retaliatory strike on the Chinese homeland—Chinese leadership is unlikely to take that risk.

In sum, if Beijing decided to invade Taiwan, China could possibly engage in nuclear threats or use to deter outside intervention; compel Taiwan to surrender; defeat Taiwanese, US, or allied forces; or force negotiations if the Chinese conventional offensive was on the brink of collapse.

Scenarios for US Limited Nuclear First Use

The United States might choose to use nuclear weapons in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan—especially if a Chinese victory looked imminent or if China engaged in a nonnuclear strategic attack on the US homeland. US declaratory policy does not rule out nuclear first use.23 This policy assures allies and partners that the United States would consider using nuclear weapons to deter or respond to a strategic attack. Further, it forces a potential adversary not to count out US nuclear weapons if it aggressed against a US ally or partner. The United States has previously identified conditions for nuclear first use as a response to aggression. During the Cold War, the United States relied on nuclear deterrence to backstop local defenses, including prescribing that nuclear weapons be “available for use as other conventional munitions” in the event of hostilities.24 US strategists planned for nuclear first use in the event of a Soviet invasion of West Germany, a situation not dissimilar to the potential local conventional inferiority the United States may soon be facing in the Taiwan Strait. It is not outside the realm of possibility that US strategists today could adapt plans like those for the specific political and physical geography of the contemporary Western Pacific, alongside greater investment in conventional defense and closer collaboration with allies.25

The likeliest scenarios for US nuclear first use during a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would be an attack directly against the Chinese invasion force in the face of a Taiwanese defeat or as retaliation for a large-scale nonnuclear strategic attack on the US homeland or that of its allies.

The United States could find itself in a scenario in which the president decides to use nuclear weapons because he or she seeks to prevent the success of a Chinese invasion but lacks the conventional forces to do so. This situation could come about for a variety of reasons, including an intelligence failure that does not provide warning of a Chinese buildup, a successful Chinese conventional preemptive strike on key US conventional forces in the region, or a failure by the United States to invest in sufficient conventional forces to defend Taiwan. In this case, the United States would seek to use nuclear weapons against the invasion force to frustrate the immediate success of the attack and to provide time for reinforcements or give room for diplomacy.

The United States might also seek to use nuclear weapons to deter or respond to a nonnuclear strategic attack on the US homeland or nuclear command and control. The 2022 National Defense Strategy “[r]ecogniz[es] growing kinetic and non-kinetic threats to the United States’ homeland from our strategic competitors.”26 China can likely conduct kinetic or non-kinetic attacks on the United States. These attacks could include disruptions of critical infrastructure (e.g., the power grid or financial system), which might rise to the level of “extreme circumstances” that threaten “the vital interests” of the United States, as described in the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review.27 US leaders might consider nuclear use to demonstrate to China that it cannot expect to gain enduring advantage from these nonnuclear strategic attacks on the US homeland or those of US allies and partners.

Scenarios for an Extended Nuclear Exchange

In the event that either the United States or China used a single nuclear weapon or a handful of nuclear weapons in any of the scenarios above, the prospect for an extended nuclear exchange would loom large. Of course, a single nuclear detonation would not lead automatically to a nuclear Armageddon. Chinese leadership could conceivably elect not to respond to US nuclear use with nuclear weapons of its own—especially if China seemed likely to prevail regardless. A US response to a Chinese nuclear first use could also possibly convince Chinese leadership that it had nothing to gain from further escalation. As in the Cold War, strategists on both sides will identify pathways from one nuclear battlefield use to a full nuclear exchange, so that knowledge may induce caution for both parties.

If a single nuclear weapon is used, it is not hard to imagine how that could escalate to a strategic nuclear exchange. The United States might use nuclear weapons against Chinese landing ships. China could retaliate by striking Andersen AFB on Guam. The United States could strike several airfields on the Chinese mainland. China could retaliate by using an ICBM against US military bases in Alaska. Strategists on both sides would start to seriously contemplate the value of a damage-limiting strike as a broader exchange begins to look inevitable. Indeed, given that the number of US nuclear weapons available for theater-based, low-yield strikes is quite low, such pressures might emerge relatively early for the United States.

### Specific Links: Domain Awareness

#### Increased domain awareness is key to US strategy of denying Chinese Arctic influence

Auerswald 21, professor of security studies at the U.S. National War College in Washington, DC. (Dr. David Auerswald, 5-27-2021, “A U.S. Security Strategy for the Arctic” https://warontherocks.com/2021/05/a-u-s-security-strategy-for-the-arctic/) wtk

Russia is not the only authoritarian power with increased interest in Arctic affairs. In January 2018, Chinese officials published their first Arctic strategy document and attempted to buy and greatly expand Finland’s Kemijärvi air base for use by large Chinese aircraft, ostensibly for Arctic research. Their offer was rejected, supposedly because the northern airfield is next to Finland’s Rovajärvi artillery range. This fits a pattern. China has built Arctic research stations, conducted ongoing oceanographic surveys, and attempted infrastructure development across the region, projects that some believe have geostrategic or military purposes.

In order to better position the United States for geopolitical competition in the region, the Biden administration should write and publish a new national security strategy for the Arctic. The United States has a moribund 2013 Arctic strategy that was superseded by events and ignored by the Trump administration. In 2019, the Office of the Secretary of Defense released an Arctic strategy, and the Air Force, Navy and Army each released their own subordinate strategies. However, these individual strategies were not coordinated before being released, did not fully integrate efforts with civilian foreign policy agencies, and in some cases were produced only because of pressure from Sen. Dan Sullivan from Alaska.

It is time to rectify those omissions. A new Arctic security strategy should focus on deterring Russian and Chinese military attacks and preventing their attempts to weaken the established Arctic international order. To avoid mistakes from past Arctic national security, the Biden administration should build an Arctic strategy that responds to future security threats, can be resourced within constrained national budgets, and that integrates military and civilian actions across the government and private sector.

Goals for an Arctic Strategy

Though the Biden administration has yet to release a National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy, guideposts exist to begin conceptualizing a new Arctic security strategy. Blinken expressed the U.S. desire to keep the Arctic peaceful when speaking at the May 2021 Arctic Council ministerial meeting. The administration’s March 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance focuses on deterring and preventing adversaries from threatening the United States and its allies, inhibiting access to the global commons, or dominating key regions (i.e., the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere). Even though the document does not mention the region, its priority actions are applicable to the Arctic, such as leading a stable and open international system underwritten by alliances, partnerships, multilateralism, and international rules.

Any new U.S. Arctic security strategy should have three goals: deter military attacks against U.S. or allied territory originating from the Arctic, prevent China or Russia from weakening existing rules-based Arctic governance through coercion, and prevent regional hegemony by either China or Russia. To accomplish these goals, U.S. strategy should develop military capabilities for use in the North American and European Arctic subregions and then demonstrate the ability to use them in harsh Arctic conditions. The U.S. government should persuade regional allies and partners that the United States can be a trusted security partner in the region. Finally, the strategy should contain inducements to the private sector to build dual-use Arctic infrastructure that benefits the private sector while giving the military platforms from which to observe and operate in the Arctic.

The Arctic’s Geopolitical Context

Any Arctic strategy is constrained by the region’s harsh terrain and weather conditions. High latitudes and harsh weather make communications, global positioning, and domain awareness a significant challenge across the Arctic. In the Alaskan Arctic, ground-based infrastructure outside the Anchorage-Fairbanks-Prudhoe corridor is localized rather than interconnected and is dependent on bulk summer resupply. U.S. security infrastructure in the Arctic comprises aging early warning radars in Alaska and Greenland, missile defenses and significant 5th-generation fighter aircraft in Alaska, submarines in Arctic waters, and modest rotational forces in Iceland and Norway. U.S. relations with Arctic nations have been generally cooperative, with the exception of relations with Russia on non-Arctic issues since 2014. Finally, different security issues are associated with the three Arctic subregions — the North American, European, and Russian Arctic — with the European Arctic subregion being the area with the greatest security challenges.

#### Stronger US leadership in the arctic prevents China from gaining global great power status

Funaiole et al. 23, \*vice president of the iDeas Lab, Andreas C. Dracopoulos Chair in Innovation, and senior fellow in the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. \*\*deputy director and fellow of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. \*\*\*senior fellow for Imagery Analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, \*\*\*\*associate fellow with the iDeas Lab at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. (\*Matthew P. Funaiole, \*\*Brian Hart, \*\*\*Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., \*\*\*\*Aidan Powers-Riggs, 4-18-2023, “Frozen Frontiers: China’s Great Power Ambitions in the Polar Regions” CSIS https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-polar-research-facility/) wtk

China’s expanding presence in both the Arctic and Antarctic is part of its broader pursuit of global great power status. Its contributions to polar science have given it a voice and a presence in polar affairs, while opening the door to advance military and strategic goals. China is by no means the only great power to use science for strategic ends, yet mounting geopolitical competition is raising the stakes for China's polar pursuits.

International cooperation will be necessary for the responsible management and stewardship of the poles, and China can play a positive role in those efforts. Still, the United States and its allies should carefully monitor China’s evolving activities and push for greater transparency.

Washington should also focus on crafting stronger diplomatic and economic partnerships with like-minded countries and strengthening international governance mechanisms. Through these efforts, the United States can help ensure the world's frozen frontiers do not become the next hot spots of geopolitical competition.

### Specific Links: Russian Cooperation (Science Diplomacy, LNG)

#### The plan locks China out of the Arctic

Seethi 25, Director, Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension, Academic Advisor of the International Centre for Polar Studies at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala. (K.M. Seethi, “Polar Realignment: Trump, Putin, and the Future of Arctic Power Politics” https://thegeopolitics.com/polar-realignment-trump-putin-and-the-future-of-arctic-power-politics/) wtk

China and NATO Arctic States

A potential U.S.-Russia Arctic collaboration will also cast a long shadow over China’s ambitions in the region. While China has aggressively branded itself a ‘near-Arctic state’ since 2018, much of its influence has hinged on investments in Russian energy and logistics infrastructure—particularly in the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Beijing’s strategy has been to use economic partnerships to expand its strategic footprint without provoking direct geopolitical confrontation. However, a Trump-Putin rapprochement could dramatically alter these calculations.

With Russia potentially rekindling energy and logistical cooperation with the United States, China could find its economic leverage in the Arctic significantly diminished. The mutual suspicion between Moscow and Beijing is already evident in Russia’s reluctance to grant China greater influence in Arctic governance mechanisms. Trump’s strategy to “drive a wedge” between Moscow and Beijing might inadvertently succeed if Moscow perceives greater strategic and technological gains in partnering with Washington instead of relying exclusively on Beijing’s capital.

Such a shift would put China on the defensive, forcing it to rethink its Arctic investments and potentially seek new bilateral alliances with smaller Arctic states or increase engagement with Arctic Council observers like South Korea and Japan. More broadly, it may reduce China’s capacity to shape Arctic norms and infrastructure development to its advantage. China’s Arctic presence has so far been largely economic and scientific, avoiding military entanglements—but a weakening of its strategic positioning may compel Beijing to rethink its posture.

#### A US-Russia Arctic deal will lock China out of the region

Sylvie Zhuang, 3/16/2025 – “Warming US-Russia ties could put China's Arctic ambitions on ice, experts warn” South China Morning Post, factiva //DH

Beijing has relied on Moscow for access to the far north but a geopolitical realignment is under way that could see it frozen out

China is expected to redefine its Arctic policy – including an ambition to become a great polar power by 2030 – amid growing scrutiny from far northern countries and a possible US-Russia cooperation deal for the region, according to experts and insiders.

Beijing put forward its plan for a “Polar Silk Road” – as a complement to its massive infrastructure scheme, the Belt and Road Initiative – in a 2018 white paper that envisioned greater access to the Arctic’s rich natural resources and a bigger role in its governance.

China’s description of itself in the plan as a “near-Arctic state” – despite sitting 1,400km (870 miles) south of the Arctic Circle and having no territory in the region – raised the suspicions of the US and its allies, in the midst of intensifying geopolitical rivalries.

It also provoked a backlash from the Arctic countries – including Russia, which stretches across more than half of the region’s coastline and has long prioritised maintaining its sovereignty there.

Since then, China has put more emphasis on science diplomacy – including a focus on building heavy icebreakers and carrying out polar observations – while largely toning down its other ambitions.

According to Marc Lanteigne, a professor of political science at the Arctic University of Norway, “China has been trying to rework what the Polar Silk Road is all about and it has also started to take a more practical approach to the Arctic”.

An insider with direct knowledge of the situation, who spoke on condition of anonymity, noted that Beijing’s interest in continuing its Arctic push had appeared to decline in response to the geopolitical tensions.

“The Chinese interest was really first announced quite aggressively in the white paper [with] the term near-Arctic state that everybody seems to have had problems with,” the insider said.

“Now the Chinese have stopped using that term and I think we’ve seen a withdrawal, or a significantly lower Chinese interest in the Arctic.”

However, Duncan Depledge, an Arctic expert and lecturer in geopolitics and security at Loughborough University in Britain, noted the continued emphasis on building heavy icebreakers. “I’m not convinced that China’s interest in the Arctic has declined,” he said.

“I believe China is still very interested in many of the opportunities that exist to become more involved in Arctic science and commerce.”

The commitment to carry out polar observations and develop heavy icebreakers is part of China’s national development strategy, written into the 14th five-year plan for 2021-25.

China now has four of the sturdy vessels, of which the latest is the Jidi, which means “polar region”. It was completed last year to support research in the Arctic alongside the Xuelong 1 and Xuelong 2 icebreakers.

In an interview with People’s Daily in October, the China State Shipbuilding Corporation’s chief expert Wu Gang said that “the key technical challenge now for China is to build heavy icebreakers”.

With expertise concentrated in the Arctic nations and only Russia possessing nuclear-powered icebreakers, China still faced a “long and difficult road ahead”, according to Wu’s remarks in the report.

China and Russia have been working together to develop the sea routes that are opening up as a result of global warming, raising the possibility of a lucrative permanent sea lane that would slash shipping times between Europe and Asia.

In August last year, Premier Li Qiang and his Russian counterpart Mikhail Mishustin signed a joint communique in which the two countries agreed to develop Arctic shipping routes.

State-owned Chinese companies have also been exploring the region’s natural resources. In December, the China Oilfield Services rig COSL Prospector discovered up to 52 million barrels of oil in an appraisal well in Norwegian Arctic waters.

Nato has been concerned about China’s activities in the region, including its collaboration with Russia, the only non-member of the military alliance that sits on the Arctic Council, the inter-governmental organisation established in 1996.

The other members of the council are the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden. China and 12 other countries – including France, Germany and Japan – have observer status and can take part in its discussions.

In 2022, Nato’s then secretary general Jens Stoltenberg stressed the need for the alliance to establish a stronger presence around the North Pole, where Russian military activities were on the rise.

There are signs that China-Russia cooperation in the region is extending to military operations. In October, the Chinese coastguard joined its Russian counterpart on patrol for the first time, sailing from the North Pacific into the Arctic Ocean.

Without naming China directly, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said in December that Ottawa needed to be “tough” in its response to growing Arctic competition because “many countries, including non-Arctic states, aspire for a greater role in Arctic affairs”.

Canadian concerns were also raised in 2020, when Ottawa blocked Chinese state-owned Shandong Gold Mining from acquiring a Toronto-based firm that runs a gold mine in the Arctic, on national security grounds.

But Beijing’s collaboration with Moscow should be viewed as “more occasional than strategic”, according to the anonymous insider. “I think it’s very important that we distinguish clearly between Russia and China,” the source said.

“Russia poses an immediate military threat and the Chinese goals are more long term – focused on research and shipping – and [China’s] military interest tends to be quite far away [from Nordic countries].”

The sudden warming of the relationship between Russia and the US since President Donald Trump’s return to the White House may also affect China’s Arctic ambitions, according to Loughborough University’s Depledge.

China’s bilateral ties with Russia have deepened significantly over the years, strengthened by their shared view of the US as a rival, and culminated in Beijing’s pledge of a “no-limits” partnership with Moscow, days before the invasion of Ukraine.

But Washington’s sudden shift on its Ukraine stance under Trump has created uncertainties for Beijing, with the US pursuing a ceasefire while also looking to restore relations with Russia.

Trump has already expressed an interest in the Arctic and a deal between the US and Russia that includes cooperation in the region could get under way after their discussions on Ukraine.

“I think China for now will struggle, particularly in a scenario where Trump and Putin made a deal on the Arctic, which was explicitly trying to exclude China from the region,” Depledge said.

“If all of that happens, then it becomes a question of who would Russia rather work with? Would they rather work with China or would they rather work with Trump? Or will they seek to maintain a balance between the two?”

Given the shifting dynamics between Washington and Moscow, China’s reliance on Russia for its access to the Arctic could be “a risky strategy”, according to Depledge, who also noted that “it would be quite hard for China to find other ways in”.

Lanteigne, from the Arctic University of Norway also noted that China remained dependent on “Russia’s goodwill” to access the polar region, while pointing out that there was added uncertainty for Beijing arising from a less functional Arctic Council.

### Specific Links: Native Renewables

#### China is investing in renewables for export to less developed economies. This is the most important factor determining Chinese status and influence

Brad Glosserman, 2024 – deputy director of and visiting professor at the Center for Rule-Making Strategies at Tama University as well as senior adviser (nonresident) at Pacific Forum “What happens when China becomes the green tech superpower?” The Japan Times, 10/24, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/commentary/2024/10/22/world/china-green-tech-superpower/> //DH

Which brings me to my framing of this problem. Imagine a world in which China is the leading power in the green tech sector. Since technology is the most important factor in renewables-dominated systems, Beijing would be at the center of those economic and technological networks. IRENA explained in an April report that renewable resources are largely unaffected by geopolitics, but “harnessing them depends on the availability of technologies and finance at scale” — both of which China can provide.

China is already forging those connections. There has been a surge in Chinese outward bound investment in this sector. According to Climate Energy Finance, an Australian-research group, Chinese companies have committed $109.2 billion in foreign investments in 130 clean technology transactions since the start of 2023. Tim Buckley, director of CEF, told the Financial Times that “China was not just exporting its clean-tech manufacturing capacity surplus but was increasingly exporting its technology, engineering, supply chain and financing capacities.”

While Western countries complain about those subsidies, less developed economies see them as aid, supporting and facilitating the green transition that is critical to their future. At last year’s East Asia Summit, Chinese Premier Li Qiang encouraged Association of Southeast Asian Nations nations to collaborate with China on energy, climate change and electric vehicles.

What happens when China becomes associated with green tech the way that Japan was with superior manufacturing techniques? Or, more broadly, what if China’s green tech strategy produces “a miracle” as did Japan’s economic development policy after World War II? To this day, this country benefits from that reputation and that earns it enduring credit from consumers and business partners around the world.

China will reap similar and likely greater benefits if it becomes known and accepted as “The Green Power.” Tackling and conquering the pre-eminent global challenge would constitute an extraordinary diplomatic, political and economic victory and bestow status and influence not unlike that which the U.S. enjoyed after World War II.

The Chinese have a long way to go before they will have cemented that position of technological leadership or have surmounted their environmental challenges. And the scale of China’s problems may make “victory” impossible. But there is no mistaking the seriousness with which Beijing is eyeing this challenge and its determination to overcome it.

#### The plan reverses Trumps energy cuts and allows the US to dominate export markets and undercut strategic competitors. Alaska’s key

New Energy Alaska, 2025 – “Securing Our Energy Future: NEW ENERGY ALASKA PREPARED BY PERSPECTIVES FROM ALASKANS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL CLEAN ENERGY INCENTIVES” March, <https://newenergyalaska.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FINAL-Perspectives-from-Alaskans-on-the-Importance-of-Federal-Clean-Energy-Incentives-Digital.pdf> //DH

Even with the slow pace of implementation, we have already heard and seen clear indicators of progress:

• Hundreds of millions of dollars in awards have been announced for Alaska utilities, Tribes and Tribal consortia, Alaska Native Corporations, state government, and regional entities, all intended for the buildout of renewable energy transmission, generation and storage. This translates to significant near-term economic activity, longterm energy price stability, and energy independence.

• We are at a moment of transition in how Alaska energy developers—both traditional and emerging—think about planning and investment in Alaska. As one utility leader described, the incentives spurred discussion and reevaluations of the approach to Alaska’s energy mix, particularly on the Railbelt.

• We have heard optimism from utilities and the private sector about the potential to use Alaska’s abundant energy resources to strengthen our energy independence, our technological innovation, and our resilience in the face of global shocks.

But we have also heard concerns: that stepping back now would delay or even cancel promising advancements in clean energy in Alaska, leaving our approach to energy security as “business as usual” or dependent on decades-long development processes for major fossil fuel projects. At the same time, we would cede ground to global competitors who are moving quickly to build dominance in renewables technology and deployment. If the U.S.—and Alaska—do not lead in energy innovation, others will.

#### The plan gives Alaska the ability to export renewables to global markets

Penny Gage, 2016 - is an Emerging Leaders in Environmental and Energy Policy(ELEEP) fellow with the Atlantic Council and Ecologic Institute. “Alaska’s Microgrid Experience Applied Across Borders” 10/19 https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/alaska-s-microgrid-experience-applied-across-borders/ //DH

The experience cultivated in Alaska’s microgrid market is helping increase energy security and reduce costs, yet to move forward in a meaningful way, this expertise needs to be shared and built upon with partners in other regions, namely Europe. As other countries and communities improve upon these technologies and best practices, as a whole the microgrid market will grow. Three current projects highlight existing and possible opportunities for possible European-Alaskan microgrid cooperation. While endorsed by prominent groups such as the Arctic Council, at least one of these initiatives still lacks full funding and sufficient support from the Alaskan, US, and international communities.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska Center for Energy & Power (ACEP) has established the Global Applications Program (GAP) to assess the global opportunities for trade surrounding the use of energy systems in islanded grids. Through the program, Alaskans have been building technical expertise specific to microgrids with the goal of exporting this knowledge and building commercial ties with other countries. Additionally, the US Department of Commerce recently awarded a grant to the ACEP to establish the “Alaska Center for Microgrid Technologies Commercialization” as a means of helping new technologies survive the transition from experimentation to commercialization.

#### It specifically counters Chinese influence in the Arctic

Jeremy Dasilva, 2021 – M.A. in Global Security Studies candidate at Johns Hopkins University “Renewable Energy as a National Security Strategy in the Arctic” American Security Project, https://www.americansecurityproject.org/renewable-energy-as-a-national-security-strategy-in-the-arctic/ //DH

Renewable Energy as a National Security Strategy

Alaska has incredible potential for renewable energy production. The U.S. should focus on expanding renewable energy in the Arctic not only to meet its climate change goals, but as a national security strategy to counter growing Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Alaska’s coasts are abundant in untapped wind resources. Renewable energy accounts for 30% of Alaska’s electricity generation as of 2019, but only about 8% of this is from wind energy. The map above, provided by the Department of Energy, outlines the potential for coastal wind generation on Alaska’s coasts. Furthermore, despite Alaska’s long winters and nights, solar energy is an increasingly valuable energy source for off-grid applications in remote areas. Exploring wind and solar production in Alaska can benefit U.S. national security in two main ways:

First, The U.S. can use renewable energy infrastructure to justify an increased U.S. presence, in a similar manner that Russia uses oil and gas. Establishing a sustainable structure of microgrids and renewable energy production will take both time and resources, of which the United States can use as platforms for increased power projection through military outposts. This will allow the US to increase power projection in the Arctic and help mitigate a Russian response by providing both a valid reason for increased US forces and a method to gradually increase military presence, rather than give the appearance of a rapid military buildup. Moreover, climate change is negatively impacting current military infrastructure. Alaska is home to multiple military bases and infrastructure, which are currently being damaged by thawing permafrost and coastal erosion, which changes the landscape and damages this infrastructure. The U.S. needs to maintain this infrastructure, similar to Russia’s renovations of its Arctic military infrastructure.

## Affirmative Answers to: China Soft Power DA

### 2AC Answers to: China Soft Power DA

#### 1. US soft power is irrecoverable

Acharya 25, professor at American University. (Amitav, 6-15-2025, “Trump Is Creating a Post-Western World” https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/trump-foreign-policy-damage-to-west-opens-door-for-the-rest-by-amitav-acharya-2025-06) wtk

Some might hope that Trump’s alienation of US allies can be reversed under the next administration. Don’t bet on it. Regardless of how Trump’s tariff war plays out, the damage to the idea of the West has already been done. As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyenput it, “the West as we knew it no longer exists.” The Liberal Party’s astonishing comeback in Canada shows the depth of that country’s revulsion vis-à-vis the US. Relationships that were shredded overnight will take years to rebuild.

Might Trump still strengthen the US, even as he weakens the West? Don’t bet on that, either. Not only have America’s friends and allies lost faith in it as a reliable security or trading partner; they will constantly wonder what other resources and concessions the US might try to squeeze out of them. Such concerns will weaken the alliance system that has always given the West a decisive edge over Russia and China.

Though countries such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, India, and Singapore are not going to cut security ties with the US, they and others will be tempted to reduce their dependence on America and improve ties with others. Trump’s foreign policy will almost certainly lead to more hedging or non-alignment. The European Union, for example, will seek to expand its partnerships with non-Western emerging powers such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey.

At the same time, Trump’s policies could strengthen the momentum behind groupings like the BRICS, which recently added five new members, bringing the total to ten. They also will enhance the appeal of arrangements that include China but not the US. For example, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, an Asia-Pacific free-trade agreement that includes US partners and allies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, could become a significant global player, as is also true of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which brings together China, India, Britain, Germany, and Italy.

Such extra-American cooperation, already seen in the Law of the Sea, the International Criminal Court, and the Paris climate agreement, will gain even more traction in a Trumpian world. The new US administration is rapidly undercutting not only Western dominance, but also America’s own global influence. Trump is sure to encourage different combinations of rising powers, middle powers, regional influencers, and other arrangements across the “West-Rest” divide. And this new framework – what I call a global multiplex – will hasten the arrival of both a post-American and a post-Western world.

#### 2. US and Chinese influence in the Arctic isn’t zero-sum

Peiqing and Huiwen 23, \*Professor at the School of International Affairs and Public Administration, Ocean University of China \*\*Ph.D. candidate of the College of Foreign Languages, Ocean University of China. (\*Guo Peiqing, \*\*Chen Huiwen, 6-20-2023, “Chinese Perspective on the Arctic and its Implication for Nordic Countries” *The Arctic Institute,* https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/chinese-perspective-arctic-implication-nordic-countries/) wtk

The U.S. has no ability to oblige the Nordic countries to disengage with China

Expelling Chinese power from the Arctic and preventing China from gaining a foothold in the Nordic region is one of the goals of U.S. Arctic strategy. In recent years, the U.S. has strengthened its control over the Nordic countries through military and intelligence cooperation, constantly forced the Nordic countries to disengage from China and attempted to exclude China from the Nordic region while controlling the Nordic countries at the same time. But the complementary economic structures between the Nordic countries and China as well as the attractiveness of Chinese funding and infrastructure technology makes disengagement impractical. The Nordic countries will lose diplomatic autonomy if they blindly follow the US instruction. They will miss the opportunity to ride the Chinese development train.

Globally, it has been the goal of U.S. policymakers to push the U.S. and its allies to disengage with China in the areas of economic trade, technology, and education. This aim replicates the Cold War era when they ganged up and disintegrated the Soviet Union. Some experts call it the “New Cold War.” Such theorists argue that China will collapse if it is excluded from the current international system and prevented from benefiting from the world trading system and technological development – as what happened with the Soviet Union. However, policymakers holding this assumption do not realize the difference between today’s China and the Soviet Union of the Cold War era. China manufactures large amounts of industrial goods for the world every day, and has the largest and most comprehensive industrial system in the world. Even the United States is not yet able to decouple from China. Despite escalating national security tensions, trade between the United States and China hit a record high in 2022, with the bilateral goods trade between the countries rising to $690.6 billion, according to official U.S. data, topping the previous record of $658.8 billion in 2018. Exports to China increased by $2.4 billion to $153.8 billion, while imports of Chinese products rose by $31.8 billion to $536.8 billion, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.9)

The U.S. sanctions against China inevitably lead to damage to its allies’ economic systems. In President Joe Biden’s 2023 State of the Union address, the U.S. leader announced that it wants to begin a trade embargo against allies: “Tonight, I’m announcing new standards that all construction materials used in federal infrastructure projects must be made in the United States. America-made lumber, glass, gypsum board and fiber optic cable. American roads, American bridges and American highways will be made with American products.” U.S. alliance policy is filled with a plethora of inherent contradictions, such as targeting the embargo on products made by allies – harming the interests of allies. Will the U.S. policy succeed in defending “Made in America” and excluding Chinese and U.S. ally products? History and facts have proved its failure. As long as China insists on “equality and mutual benefit” and continues to strengthen the trade ties with the world, and if the U.S. allies can benefit from trade with China, the policy of containing and isolating China is doomed to failure. Britain, France, West Germany, Japan and Canada traded with the Soviet Union despite the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. There is a similar situation with China today. At the request of Russia, the UN Security Council held a public meeting on February 21, 2023 for the Nord Stream gas pipeline explosion of last September. The convening nations discussed launching an international investigation of the Nord Stream II explosion. The results of the investigation may continue to tear apart the US-led Atlantic alliance system.

Because the U.S. shares more of the same political-economic values as the Nordic countries, China has never expected the Nordic countries to side with China, nor expected the Nordic countries to betray the United States. What China plans to do is to ignite Nordic countries’ ideals for higher standards of living, to awaken their inspiration for national dignity and their dream for independent policy making. Nobody can stop people’s aspiration for a better life once it is ignited. The elites and populations of the Nordic countries have the natural right to pursue higher levels of economic development, higher-level industrial structures and more autonomous national strategies. If the U.S. attempts to forcefully separate these countries from China, including commercial and academic exchanges between both sides, it may instead stimulate greater interest in their exchanges with China and raise the cost of U.S. control over its allies, since it is impossible to cut off the Nordic countries from China in the information age.

The U.S. Nordic policy will eventually bite back at itself

The U.S. is a capitalist country, and the principle of confrontation with China in the Nordic region is subject to hegemonic and economic interests. The costs of competing with China in the Nordic region have to be calculated and balanced. Confrontation with China can only be profitable and sustainable if the benefits outweigh the costs. Once the costs are higher than the benefits, it will be difficult for the U.S. to sustain the competition. The profit-seeking properties of capital dictates a strong internal countervailing force which will make the U.S. tired of dealing with it. According to the analyses of Hillary Clinton, China has the advantage of a more powerful political system than the United States, which controls fewer national resources than China. “We’ll never beat China unless ‘we take back the means of production.’”10) China can utilize more resources and compete with the U.S. at any cost, but the U.S. political system cannot do so. Due to the political system advantages, China will be the last winner in the Nordic competing with the U.S.

According to Chinese Taoism, “Reversion is the action of Tao（反者道之动)”, which means that things may develop in the opposite direction of the will, and that strengths and weaknesses can be transformed into each other. U.S. Arctic policy is falling into the trap of “Reversion is the action of Tao” by aggravating friends, helping adversaries, and hurting itself. The result of oppressing allies and sacrificing their interests blindly is to push them toward China.

The U.S. is falling into a trap and vicious cycle. The greater the effort to boycott China, the greater the price it has to pay and the greater the loss it will suffer. Any miscalculation will push the U.S.’ allies toward China, which adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win. The disastrous effects of U.S. policy are not visible now, but they will be in the future. The Nordic countries could maintain and increase cooperation with the U.S. rationally, while strengthening their ties with China which adhere to win-win cooperation and keeping its promises, and obtain practical benefits and national dignity in the face of power competition. For the United States, the only way out is to either give up the vicious competition with China or cooperate with China to maintain peace and prosperity in the North Atlantic and Arctic.

#### 3. China fails in the Arctic and won’t try to lead

Lackenbauer et al. 22, \*Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in the Study of the Canadian North and a professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University. \*\*Associate professor teaching in the Public Policy and Governance program at St. Francis Xavier University. \*\*\*PhD candidate at the University of Calgary and serves as the policy and research coordinator in the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network. (\*Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, \*\*Dr. Adam Lajeunesse, \*\*\*Ryan Dean, 10-3-2022, “Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic” Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3172586/why-china-is-not-a-peer-competitor-in-the-arctic/) wtk

China as Military Peer Competitor in the Arctic?

The Arctic is not as central or important to China as the writings of many Western Arctic commentators might suggest. Beijing’s main preoccupations are still closer to home. Taiwan still represents the PLA’s main strategic direction, with other clear priorities including the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and China’s borders with India and North Korea.45 The PLA’s priorities, as expressed by its shipbuilding and force design, certainly demonstrate this focus on China’s near-abroad (Taiwan and taking full control of the disputed waters of the South China Sea in particular). In short, the closer a region is to China, the more important it is to Beijing, with Chinese strategists viewing the world as a series of concentric circles of decreasing priority. Beyond Asia, Chinese attention is given to Africa, Europe, and then the Americas. While this means China will risk undertaking provocative actions closer to home, such as military exercises near Taiwan or the PLA’s construction and fortification of artificial islands in the South China Sea, it does not mean China will do so in the comparatively distant Arctic.46

Given the small Chinese footprint in the Arctic and hypothetical military threat in or through the Arctic, what accounts for the vigor with which many political and academic commentators insist that the United States and its Arctic state allies must mount a military response to China in the region? Narratives tend to conflate the more hypothetical risk that China poses as an international actor in the Arctic with the real risk that Beijing already poses as a regional actor in the Pacific. The danger is that over-inflated or misplaced fears about China’s military threat to and in the Arctic may prove to be a strategic distraction, diverting Arctic states’ attention and defense resources from elsewhere.47 In this sense, prematurely elevating China to military peer or near-peer competitor status in the Arctic can divert attention from parts of the world where the PRC’s capabilities and interests actually warrant such status.

Within the Chinese bureaucracy, the polar regions are formally categorized as maritime affairs. Accordingly, Beijing’s emerging Arctic strategy is part of China’s maritime strategy, and policy documents show that China’s growing Arctic interests reflect the growing importance that Beijing attaches to maritime affairs.48 China’s rapid economic rise has fueled its military modernization, but sober analysis shows that very little of this effort has been applied to the Arctic.49 China began commissioning a series of ice-capable patrol boats in 2016, though these were not designed for polar ice conditions. China also has two icebreakers that can work through up to 1.5 meters of ice. These, however, are unarmed.50 The so-called icebreaker gap between China and the United States is more the result of commentators attempting to shame US decision makers into recapitalizing America’s own fleet than about Chinese scientific vessels posing threat. China has few aircraft that could reach the Arctic, and the People’s Liberation Army Navy’s (PLAN) nuclear submarine fleet is small and ill-equipped for under-ice operations.51 Ultimately, we see China’s ability to project military power into the Arctic as minimal—a fact unlikely to change in the foreseeable future because of the limited strategic gains to be had in the region compared to commensurate energies invested in other parts of the world.52

A rational calculus of the threat that the Chinese military might pose to Arctic states yields modest risks in even the worst-case scenario. In 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo decried China’s “pattern of aggressive behavior” around the world and raised the prospective of PLAN submarines operating under the ice-cap.53 However, as Adam Lajeunesse and Tim Choi have argued, the use of North American waters by Chinese submarines for regular operations is unlikely given the lack of attractive targets in the region, the danger of moving ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) through the Bering Strait, the geographical constraints on Chinese sea control or denial of the region, and the limitations of the Northwest Passage as a route to move joint forces to Asian theaters.54

A preoccupation with Chinese icebreakers or even submarines as capabilities designed to challenge Arctic sovereignty or launch attacks against the Arctic states may miss the larger picture. Growing strategic competition between China and the United States affects all the Arctic states, but the epicenter of their competition remains the Indo-Pacific region. The danger in overestimating China’s Arctic military capability is that such a narrow fixation draws resources away from the real center of gravity in Sino-Western competition. Along these lines, Beijing may anticipate that any display of Chinese military interest or capability in the region will draw a disproportionate response from the Arctic states. Accordingly, the Arctic may present an enticing opportunity for China to feign strategic interest and bait Arctic states to over-invest in or over-commit capabilities to that region rather than elsewhere in the world. In short, the Arctic offers potential advantage as a diversionary theater.55 In contrast to other commentators’ representation of the Arctic as a theater of primary and particular interest for the Chinese,56 we suggest that Chinese strategy and behavior in the Arctic are best appreciated as a part of a global expansion of soft power with specific interests centered around economic and long-term governance objectives.

Conclusions

China is a strategic competitor both globally and regionally, but Beijing is not a peer or even near peer in an Arctic context. To suggest that China enjoys such status plays into Beijing’s desired narrative about its place as a near-Arctic state with rights and interests throughout the region. Rather than casting China as this regional peer competitor and fixating on China as a direct military threat to Arctic state sovereignty or security, analysts should focus on how Beijing’s Arctic strategy reflects its global objectives. China does not have unlimited resources, and the level of Beijing’s direct investment in the Arctic has been overstated—particularly when it comes to northern infrastructure development. Although few Chinese projects have actually materialized, Western media and experts have inadvertently played into the narrative that China is a key (and even essential) economic player across the Arctic, relying on superficial information and media releases to reinforce China’s claims to relevance. Furthermore, China is certainly not a peer to the United States or any other Arctic coastal state in the maritime domain. Its scientific research icebreakers do not have the same presence, impact, and capabilities as the Arctic state fleets, and its knowledge of the region naturally lags those states’ considerably—even though China has effectively leveraged its reputation and limited activities to “normalize” its regional presence.57

#### 4. Soft power isn’t key—the CCP will be able to maintain legitimacy regardless

**Scobell 21**, PhD, senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation. (Andrew, 2-3-2021, "China’s Post-Pandemic Future: Wuhan Wobbly?", *War on the Rocks*, https://warontherocks.com/2021/02/chinas-post-covid-future-wuhan-wobbly/)

How Stable Is China?

Because **the CCP has maintained** itself in political **power for seven decades** **and weathered multiple internal upheavals and external challenges**, many scholars and analysts assume this will continue. Certainly, that **the party survived the worldwide crisis of communism in the late 1980s** and early 1990s is remarkable. Communist parties fell from power across Eastern Europe in 1989 and the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union could not prevent its own demise two years later.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, **some predicted the beginning of the end**. At the turn of the century, one analyst wrote of The Coming Collapse of China. But the CCP has demonstrated considerable resilience. More recently, a prominent U.S. scholar caused a sensation when he penned a provocatively titled essay, “The Coming Chinese Crackup.” A year later, the same scholar clarified that what he forecast was the gradual decline of CCP rule rather than its imminent disintegration. Most recently, another respected scholar forecast “China’s coming upheaval.”

**The resilience of the ruling CCP and its ability to maintain power are attributed to a combination of carrots and sticks**. The foremost “carrot” is **China’s booming economy**, which **has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty.** **The party also gets popular credit for maintaining law and order**, **which is partly driven by the public’s phobia of instability**. Moreover, under CCP rule, **China has grown in power** and stature **on the world stage. Chinese people take tremendous pride in the fact that their country is now considered a great power** and respected by other countries. **Credit** **for China’s rising hard and soft power** **goes to the CCP**.

**The CCP has assembled an impressive “stick”: a muscular, multilayered, and technologically sophisticated coercive apparatus** or “digital authoritarianism.” **Local public security bure**aus and People’s Armed Police **are reinforced by closed-circuit television, informants, and thugs for hire.** All of **this is backstopped by the** regular military, the People’s Liberation Army (**PLA**). Moreover, **the People’s Militia has been revitalized** in recent years **and is mobilized to deal with emergencies**, including social unrest and natural disasters. **The CCP appears to be in a strong position**, **with an array of instruments for social control**. Moreover, it **has deftly handled most challenges and threats in the reform era.**

The greatest irony of the People’s Republic — as I have written elsewhere — is that what the ruling CCP fears most are the people of China. The CCP is fearful that the people power opposition movements which shook countries and toppled regimes around the world will inspire Chinese crowds to take to the streets. The CCP is preoccupied with a plethora of different groups — disgruntled workers, irate farmers, unhappy veterans, disaffected religious groups, and restive ethnic minorities — each of which has registered dissatisfaction through physical demonstrations and online activism in recent years.

**But the Chinese Communist Party’s greatest challenge may not come from the people. While Chinese have numerous complaints** about corruption, pollution, income inequalities, and other issues, **most remain supportive of the CCP**.

#### 5. Leadership Turn:

#### a. U.S. soft power is key to prevent an authoritarian, China-led order.

Niklas **Swanström 24**, Director of the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studie, Senior Associate Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2024, “Afterword,” in *In Defense of the Liberal International Order*, Eds. Norah M. Huang, Jagannath Panda, and Tatsuo Shikata, Prospect Foundation, pp. 210, https://isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/In-Defense-of-the-Liberal-International-Order-OneFile-16-February.pdf.

The competition between the United States, the dominant power, and the EU on one side and China and Russia, challenging authoritarian powers, on the other side is not merely a conflict in terms of geopolitical hard power and materials, but it is also about contesting for beliefs and political values. China has amped up its economic, military, and technological advances with the intent to undermine the U.S.-led existing order and to create a new China-led international order. For this purpose, China is looking to rebuild partnerships across the world, particularly in the Global South. While China’s influence has been on the rise among these states, its ties in Europe have been deteriorating primarily due to China’s coercive economic and diplomatic policies, but also Beijing’s indirect support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The EU, on its part, has started to reinforce cooperation with like-minded partners, equipping itself with defensive tools designed to help identify threats and articulate common responses. In this context, the growth in transatlantic ties could be crucial to rebuilding an effective, representative liberal international order that is relevant in the new era, but equally important is the broader cooperation with small and medium sized like-minded states and increased engagement in the Global South to offer alternatives to authoritarian values and systems.

#### b. Chinese led order ignites hotspots and risks US-China and US-Russia war – only maintaining hegemony can keep peace.

Brands ’24 [Hal; 7/20; Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), PhD, MPhil, MA in history at Yale, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; Bloomberg, “China and Russia Are Breaking the World Into Pieces,” https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/features/2024-07-21/china-and-russia-are-breaking-america-s-world-into-pieces?srnd=undefined]

​The stability of the international system has long been closely related to the stability of the key regions of Eurasia: Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. War or the threat of war pervades all three areas at once.

This makes a final feature of our era more sobering: a still powerful, but less reliable, America. US advantages, economic and military, remain substantial, and American commitment remains indispensable to a decent world. Unfortunately, at a time when many Western countries face political paralysis, instability, or some mixture of the two, America’s own internal dramas could be uniquely damaging.

Yes, the near-term danger is a second Trump presidency that could weaken US alliances and spur frontline states like Poland or South Korea to build their own nuclear weapons — or, alternatively, a second Biden presidency in which America is led by a visibly declining commander-in-chief. But the problems run deeper.

Lurking behind Trump is a larger America First movement that would just as soon leave the world to itself. Lurking behind Biden is a potentially potent form of progressive neo-isolationism. The political foundations of American internationalism are thus unstable. Rising polarization and domestic tensions could leave the US distracted, even consumed by its inner demons — just as surging global volatility makes the price of that distraction higher.

World War III?

Eras of turmoil can bring happy endings. The Cold War birthed the liberal international order, which eventually delivered more freedom, peace and prosperity than humanity had ever enjoyed before. Today, realism need not be synonymous with despondency, because the US and its democratic allies still have long-term advantages over their foes, including their free governmental institutions. But for political leaders and business leaders, navigating this age of fragmentation will require keeping some core principles in mind.

First, there is no return to “normal.” Today’s crises in Ukraine, the Middle East and other hotspots aren’t freak occurrences. They are symptoms of deep, ongoing shifts that are changing the basic rhythms of global affairs.

Particular crises may come and go; particular tensions may rise or fall. But leaders in government and business must prepare for an era of persistent vitality, competition and conflict. Levels of risk, both strategic and economic, will be elevated for years to come.

Second, you can’t have it all. After the Cold War, the US and its allies could enjoy a world that was phenomenally congenial to their interests and values at a very low price. Multinationals could exploit the efficiencies globalization offered without worrying too much about the vicissitudes of global politics. Neither approach is sustainable today.

As the leaders who attended this month’s NATO summit can attest, the cost of national security, and of safeguarding democratic values, is rising as autocratic powers make their moves. Meanwhile, Western companies that had to choose whether to stay in Russia after it invaded Ukraine — or are wondering how to protect their assets, operations and reputations if China invades Taiwan — are discovering that the dilemmas of operating in a hothouse environment can be severe.

Third, take worst-case scenarios seriously. Responsible American officials need to consider not just the possibility of a US-Russia clash or a US-China conflict — as cataclysmic as either would be — but also a global war, in which conflicts in multiple theaters erupt at once. International corporations also need to grapple with scenarios that would have seemed outlandish not so long ago.

What if the security of vital sea lanes suffers because the Houthis have set a precedent that others follow? How might their operations be affected by a Sino-American war that causes a decoupling more violent, precipitous and far-reaching than nearly anyone envisions today? We can hope these situations won’t come to pass. But grappling with them is how one builds the resilience, whether military or intellectual, needed to thrive in a tumultuous world.

Fourth, as geopolitics and geoeconomics become inseparable, the West needs to invest in new knowledge. In government, national security is no longer so thoroughly dominated by diplomats and defense nerds. Understanding investment patterns, financial and technological choke points, and private sector decision-making has become crucial to prevailing in modern rivalry. The private sector, for its part, is entering a moment in which geopolitical illiteracy is simply negligent , given that few firms are wholly insulated from the disruption — or opportunity — national rivalries can cause.

This relates to a final precept: Find the upside of adversity. Yes, the world is getting nastier. But an age of fracture creates chances for the US to build deeper connections with like-minded nations in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, to catalyze a historic burst of innovation in critical technologies, and to demonstrate that liberal societies can still outperform illiberal ones.

It creates chances, as well, for firms to craft more resilient supply chains; to reap the benefits of the new industrial policy; and to forge stronger partnerships with a US government that desperately needs private-sector creativity and innovation to master a new set of economic, intelligence and military challenges.

We’re in the opening phase of a brutally contentious era. The task is to make the most of it.

#### 6. No Taiwan war—Xi is risk averse.

Roy 24, PhD, Senior Fellow @ the East-West Center in Honolulu. (Denny, 4-17-2024, "Why China remains unlikely to invade Taiwan," Lowy Institute, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-china-remains-unlikely-invade-taiwan)

We cannot know Xi’s priorities with certainty. Nevertheless, from what we can observe, an elective war against Taiwan is hardly a compelling proposition for Xi’s government.

Even with China’s massive arsenal of modern warships, combat aircraft and missiles, Beijing is nowhere near the level of superiority that would guarantee a successful invasion given the probability of US and Japanese military resistance. Xi would need to worry about more than ferrying enough forces and their supplies across the Strait through the gauntlet of Taiwanese, US and Japanese ships, missiles, submarines, mines and drones. A cross-Strait war would disrupt regional economic activity, threatening the livelihoods of millions of Chinese. The resulting social turmoil could endanger Xi’s rule.

A Chinese blockade of Taiwan’s ports would be less risky, but would have disadvantages. Taiwan’s government may choose to resist. Beijing’s action would stimulate increased anti-China cooperation around the world; China could expect to suffer sanctions over a long period. And the United States would have ample time to surge forces into the region to assist Taiwan.

Beijing’s attempts to intimidate the US government into abandoning support for Taiwan have failed. Helping Taiwan to defend itself remains bipartisan US policy, even supported by Republican Party politicians who want to stop arming Ukraine. Despite the longstanding US policy of “strategic ambiguity”, President Joe Biden has publicly stated four times that US forces would intervene in Taiwan’s defence.

Xi doesn’t necessarily need to solve the Taiwan problem during his tenure to earn a legacy in Chinese history. Xi has three huge domestic projects. The first is restoring the primacy and authority of the Communist Party, which prior to Xi’s tenure as general secretary had suffered a decline in prestige due to rampant corruption, decentralised governance and the empowerment of civil society. The second is what Xi sees as ideological purification, including cleansing China of “Western” ideas and values. Third, Xi must oversee the transition of China’s economy from reliance on exports and investment in infrastructure to a new model that can maintain robust growth and advance China from a middle-income to a high-income country. Success in these projects would be enough to secure glory for Xi, who already enjoys a section in the Party’s constitution honouring “Xi Jinping Thought.”

A struggling economy does not make Beijing more likely to launch a war. China’s economic malaise appears to have dampened the Chinese public’s enthusiasm for a Taiwan campaign. The natural reaction to a lack of strength at home is to be more cautious in foreign affairs, not more aggressive. Thus, the appearance of serious issues in China’s economy in 2023 led to Xi trying to lower tensions with the United States, and a direct appeal to the business community to invest more in China during Xi’s visit to California last year.

Several US commentators and politicians raised alarm about Xi purportedly “warning” Biden during the California summit that China plans to forcibly seize Taiwan. A more accurate summary of Xi’s remarks would be that he restated the decades-old mantra that unification will happen. He gave no timeline, he said he hoped it would occur by peaceful means, and he denied that his government has a plan to attack Taiwan.

Like any People’s Republic paramount leader, Xi must repeat the promise of eventual unification, build up a military machine that deters independence, insist that the international community adheres to the “one China” principle, and maintain pressure on Taipei to enter negotiations with Beijing. There is no indication that Xi’s position in China is in jeopardy due to a perception he is not tough enough toward Taiwan.

Xi needs merely to avoid Taiwan declaring formal independence. If Taiwan did do so, Xi would probably opt for war. But even Taiwanese governments controlled by the Democratic Progressive Party, which rejects the idea of Taiwan being part of China, have shown that they will not cross this line.

Xi reached the pinnacle of the Party hierarchy through a career of careful positioning and quiet ruthlessness, not by taking grand gambles. Since then, he has shown a preference for grey-zone tactics. There is no convincing reason to expect him to rush to a military showdown over Taiwan.

### Extend: “US Soft Power Irrecoverable”

#### Even if revival of US image is possible, it won’t happen under Trump

Nye 25, dean of the Harvard Kennedy School and a U.S. assistant secretary of Defense. (Joseph S. Nye Jr., 5-21-2025, “Does American soft power have a future?” *LA Times* https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2025-05-21/donald-trump-china-soft-power-foreign-policy) wtk

American soft power recovered after low points during the Vietnam and Iraq wars, as well as during Trump’s first term. But once trust is lost, it is not easily restored. After the invasion of Ukraine, Russia lost most of what soft power it had. Right now, China is striving to fill any soft power gaps that Trump creates. The way Chinese President Xi Jinping tells it, the East is rising over the West.

If Trump thinks he can compete with China while weakening trust among American allies, asserting imperial aspirations, destroying USAID, silencing Voice of America, challenging laws at home and withdrawing from U.N. agencies, he is likely to fail. Restoring what he has destroyed will not be impossible, but it will be costly.

#### Trump is tearing down US soft power faster than it can be rebuilt

Patten 25, last British governor of Hong Kong and a former EU commissioner for external affairs, former chancellor of the University of Oxford. (Chris, 5-12-2025, “The Unmaking of American Soft Power” https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-is-destroying-what-makes-america-great-by-chris-patten-2025-05) wtk

But as US President Donald Trump’s second term unfolds, his administration is openly and deliberately dismantling the foundations of American soft power. For example, Trump seems to believe in democracy only when it works in his favor, showing little understanding – or regard – for the checks and balances that protect democratic systems from devolving into raw majoritarianism.

Unlike every postwar US president before him, Trump has the instincts of an authoritarian ruler, and he governs accordingly. On the international stage, he seems more comfortable dealing with the likes of Russian President Vladimir Putin than with America’s traditional democratic allies.

To make matters worse, Trump has surrounded himself with sycophants who eagerly echo whatever they believe he wants to hear. His occasional cabinet meetings are cringe-inducing displays of obsequiousness by senior administration officials. The level of deference is as astonishing as it is embarrassing. A prime example is Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s disgraceful description of Germany as a disguised dictatorship for designating the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) as an extremist party.

At a recent cabinet meeting marking Trump’s first 100 days in office, Vice President J.D. Vance acted as toady-in-chief. For some politicians, integrity is a small price to pay for power. Once a vocal critic who called Trump “America’s Hitler,” Vance has long since decided that he prefers to stand beside actual fascists and authoritarian strongmen.

Unsurprisingly, Trump was the only one at that cabinet meeting to address America’s faltering economy. But rather than taking responsibility for the consequences of his own disastrous policies, he shifted the blame to his predecessor, Joe Biden – despite inheriting robust GDP growth and a booming stock market.

Trump’s chaotic economic agenda rests on two main pillars. The first is the belief – championed by chainsaw-waving billionaire Elon Musk – that trillions of dollars can be saved by eliminating government waste and that deep cuts are needed to finance tax cuts for the rich. Never mind that these cuts disproportionately harm the poorest Americans or gut essential foreign-aid programs that help millions of people – and help advance US interests – around the world.

The geopolitical implications could be far-reaching. As the US slashes aid budgets, China is stepping in to fill the void, expanding its influence in Africa and Southeast Asia through increased aid and investment. Consequently, China’s popularity is rising across the developing world while America’s is in free fall.

The second pillar of Trump’s economic policy is the imposition of sweeping tariffs on nearly every major trading partner, often based on flimsy or bizarre justifications. The likely outcome is not just a global slowdown but a potential domestic recession, as indicated by the 0.3% decline in US GDP in the first quarter of 2025, compared to 2.4% growth in the fourth quarter of 2024, the last of Biden’s presidency.

This raises a critical question: Who benefits from Trump’s authoritarianism? America’s universities – arguably the best in the world – are under attack whenever their research challenges the administration’s ideological positions or simply provokes Trump’s anger. The chilling effect is already visible, with outspoken Trump critics like historian Timothy Snyder and philosopher Jason Stanley departing for universities outside the US.

Free speech, which Trump and Musk have pretended to care about, is also under threat. Media organizations that fail to toe the Republican Party line have been targeted, even as some of their billionaire owners have cravenly capitulated to Trump. The administration has also flouted the rule of law, attacking judges who question the legality of its actions while trying to roll back fundamental, constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, especially due process.

What does this mean for the values that once made America admired around the world? Has the shining “city on the hill” been reduced, metaphorically, to the kind of rubble we now see in Gaza and Ukraine? While I still have faith that the US and its people can reverse course, rebuilding the US-led international order is going to take far longer than the time it has taken Trump to tear it down.

### Extend: “Not Zero Sum”

#### Leadership in the Arctic is not zero sum—China won’t try to fill voids in US leadership

Jie 25, senior research fellow on China in the Asia-Pacific Program at Chatham House. (Yu Jie, 6-15-2025, “What China Wants” https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/china-will-pursue-own-interest-not-american-style-global-leadership-by-yu-jie-2025-06) wtk

With many commentators eulogizing the liberal international order that had hitherto underpinned US hegemony, some are wondering if President Donald Trump has given his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, a gift. While Trump prizes unpredictability, Xi aims to position China as a force for global stability. Thus, there is a widespread assumption that China will rush to fill the vacuum left by an increasingly nationalist and isolationist United States.

But the Chinese leadership has no interest in filling America’s shoes. Attempting to do so could cost China dearly just when it is undertaking a broader economic reorientation at home. The world may be tired of US interventionism – and, now, of Trumpian aggression – but that does not mean it is ready to welcome an abstemious superpower. China has studiously avoided becoming involved in major crises beyond its immediate neighborhood. Though it has proposed global initiatives on “development,” “security,” and “civilization,” and articulated a vision of multipolarity in which all countries are treated equally, its efforts to realize these goals have not gone beyond economic statecraft.

While foreign commentators debate what China’s vision entails – with some describing it as a potentially benevolent hegemon, and others as a malevolent one – Chinese authorities and intellectuals are more immediately concerned with weathering the storm that Trump has unleashed.

China’s Core Interests

Independent commentators and Chinese leaders alike have long pondered the same question: What are China’s core national interests? Viewed from outside, the answer seems straightforward: to replace the US as global leader. But pursuing that role may contradict other core interests, such as maintaining regime legitimacy and security, orchestrating a continuous rise in living standards, and reunifying Taiwan with the mainland. These goals might best be served by maintaining a cold peace with the US, rather than embracing conflict with it.

Having watched the US, China knows all too well that being a global superpower would inevitably draw it into regional conflagrations that it would prefer to avoid. But China also knows that it has benefited massively from the relatively stable world economy that the US and its allies helped bring about.

China needs to retain enormous amounts of resources and manpower domestically to tackle its biggest challenges. Chinese leaders must manage an economy that is no longer driven primarily by property development and exports, while preparing for the possibility that one of its largest trading partners could descend into total isolation. Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariffs and escalatory duties in response to Chinese countermeasures were a wake-up call. Whatever happens in the trade war, China urgently needs to rebalance its economy by stimulating greater domestic demand.

#### China won’t exercise even partial leadership

Jie 25, senior research fellow on China in the Asia-Pacific Program at Chatham House. (Yu Jie, 6-15-2025, “What China Wants” https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/china-will-pursue-own-interest-not-american-style-global-leadership-by-yu-jie-2025-06) wtk

No Pax Sinica

Looking ahead, China would face three big challenges in pursuing even partial or limited global leadership. First, given America’s accelerated withdrawal from international affairs, China might struggle to sustain its commercial engagement with many parts of the world. After all, the US wants to impose drastic costs on those who do business with China, and it may well get its way.

Second, China cannot avoid engagement in dangerous security situations forever. Sooner or later, it will have to develop a truly global foreign policy. In fact, simply putting its own Global Security Initiative into practice would require it to do much more heavy lifting, not only in setting the agenda but also in terms of deploying security personnel and resources. How China approaches this challenge will depend on how others perceive it and respond to its bids for limited international leadership. America may be retreating, but that does not mean it will sit idly by and watch China try to increase its own influence.

Third, China still needs to orchestrate a domestic economic rebalancing – a process that will have enormous global consequences. Shifting from export-led growth to greater domestic consumption will take years, and the push to rebalance may run up against China’s ambition to remain a global manufacturing powerhouse. The latter objective is already causing tensions with Europe and some developing countries whose domestic manufacturers are struggling to compete with Chinese national champions (such as the electric-vehicle maker BYD). Countries may abhor US tariff coercion, but they are also wary of Chinese competition. Chinese leaders will need to “read the room” and proceed accordingly.

Thus, even as its economy continues to grow, China will remain a largely self-centered and reluctant superpower. Unlike the US, its domestic political economy calls for a more restrained foreign policy, focused primarily on its immediate neighbors and commercial opportunities in the Global South.

### Extend: “China Fails in the Arctic”

#### China is being locked out of the Arctic by western countries

Lackenbauer et al. 22, \*Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in the Study of the Canadian North and a professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University. \*\*Associate professor teaching in the Public Policy and Governance program at St. Francis Xavier University. \*\*\*PhD candidate at the University of Calgary and serves as the policy and research coordinator in the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network. (\*Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, \*\*Dr. Adam Lajeunesse, \*\*\*Ryan Dean, 10-3-2022, “Why China Is Not a Peer Competitor in the Arctic” Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3172586/why-china-is-not-a-peer-competitor-in-the-arctic/) wtk

That stated, commentators have a strong propensity to focus on potential Chinese investments. Sober analysis, however, reveals that the Arctic states have not blindly or naïvely accepted Chinese investments, and recent trends suggest a strong sentiment against attempts by Chinese actors to acquire land or strategic infrastructure in the Arctic.34 A telling example is Chinese real estate tycoon Huang Nubo’s failed 2014 attempt to buy a 218 km2 parcel of land near Longyearbyen on Svalbard, ostensibly to build a resort for Chinese tourists. Likewise, Chinese state-owned company General Nice Group’s attempt to purchase a former naval base in Greenland failed three years later. In 2020, state-owned Shandong Gold Mining announced a deal to buy TMAC Resources and the Hope Bay mining project in Nunavut, Canada. A Canadian review deemed it a national security risk, culminating in a formal rejection in December 2020. These examples are illustrative of a wider trend of growing caution among Arctic states and recognition of the security risks posed by Chinese investment in resource development projects and infrastructure. However, displeased with these outcomes, Beijing has been unable to force China’s way in.

As the circumpolar North steadily pushes away from China’s win-win narrative, Russia remains the one Arctic state still willing to embrace it. Until 2014, Russia was wary of Beijing’s self-described Arctic role, particularly China’s desired place in regional governance structures.35 In the wake of Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent imposition of Western sanctions, Moscow turned to China for the investment and markets needed to advance Russia’s vital Arctic resource projects. Moscow has had some success, most clearly the Yamal LNG project, which is partially owned by China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) (20 percent) and the Silk Road Fund (9.9 percent). Moscow has also highlighted Russia’s growing access to Chinese markets and capital to counter the perception that Western sanctions have been successful in damaging or isolating the Russian economy.

While China’s role in Russia’s Arctic economy has certainly grown since 2014, this is not representative of a broader or systemic Chinese integration into the region. Chinese multinational oil companies are loath to run afoul of Western sanctions, and China’s embrace of Russia has not stopped those firms from discreetly pulling back from new projects. Despite Beijing’s official position in opposition to sanctions, the Chinese government seems to recognize the difficulties that it can cause multinational companies. In March, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reportedly summoned officials from the three major energy companies (Sinopec, CNPC, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation [CNOOC]) to review their business ties with Russia and “urged them not to make any rash moves buying Russian assets.”36

Relying on Chinese companies for Arctic development presents other problems for Russia. While Chinese companies are still engaged in many of these projects, those state-owned enterprises do not bring the same capabilities as Western partners. From a technological point of view, Russia cannot reliably substitute that lost cooperation with Chinese equivalents. Russian experts have pointed to the partially Chinese-owned Arctic LNG 2 (CNOOC 10 percent / Polar Silk Road 10 percent) project as the most affected by the loss of Western engineering and technological support. Professor Natalia Zubarevich of Moscow State University made it clear that Russia should not count on China providing these critical technologies.37

A transactional need to avoid conflict and advance resource projects (for Russia) and shipping (for China) has driven Russia and China’s cooperative approach to Arctic investment and development. More broadly, the Arctic is an area where the two powers can demonstrate a degree of solidarity as part of their continuing economic and strategic conflict with the United States and the West more broadly. Nevertheless, deep differences remain—and are likely to become harder to disguise as Chinese activity in the region increasingly intrudes in traditional Russian spheres of interest. After all, China does not—and cannot—accept Russian sovereignty and control over much of the maritime space that Russia claims as internal waters.38 Connected to this are questions of China’s near-Arctic identity, its economic development, and its shipping activity in the region, which challenge Russian sovereignty and can be perceived as usurping Russia’s role in the Arctic as Moscow becomes increasingly tied to, and dependent upon, China. Russia will tolerate China as a partner, but not a peer, in Arctic development. The latter would erode Moscow’s strident attempts to legitimize Russia’s perceived position as the primary Arctic power.39

#### Their influence won’t expand past Russia

Heisler 24, foreign policy analyst, Canadian university instructor, and regional correspondent for Canadian Defense Review. (Jay, 5-17-2024, “China’s shrinking Arctic ambitions are seen as confined largely to Russia” Voice of America, https://www.voanews.com/a/china-s-shrinking-arctic-ambitions-are-seen-as-confined-largely-to-russia-/7616382.html) wtk

China’s effort to establish itself as a “near-Arctic power” have become increasingly confined to the territory of its close ally Russia as other nations lose interest in cooperating with Beijing, according to Canadian security experts.

The degree in which China poses a serious geopolitical threat in the Arctic region is debatable among experts.

Chinese efforts to establish research stations in up to half a dozen Arctic nations ground to a halt because of travel restrictions during the COVID pandemic. Mounting concerns over China’s human rights record and its aggressive actions elsewhere have made several of those countries reluctant to see operations resume, said experts.

“In many ways our fear of China and the Arctic dates back to five or six years ago when China’s power and influence seemed very much to be on the uptick in the region,” said Adam Lajeunesse, a professor focusing on Arctic issues at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. “Its political, economic and soft power influence in the Arctic outside of Russia has collapsed.

### Extend: “Soft Power isn’t Key”

#### Even without soft power, regime support will remain strong

**Huang 20**, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations. (Yanzhong Huang, 9-8-2020, "America’s Political Immune System Is Overreacting to China", *Foreign Policy*, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/08/america-overreacting-to-china-political-immune-system/)

Fallacy 2: It underestimates CCP Strength and Resilience

In identifying the CCP regime as the archrival of the United States, Secretary **Pompeo** makes a distinction between it and the “dynamic, freedom-loving” Chinese people. His belief that CCP does not represent the Chinese people might in part derived from his 1989 experience, where there was a genuine gap between Eastern European people and the ruling communist parties. He **fails to recognize** **the extremely strong support CCP receives from the Chinese society**. Indeed, **even after factoring in the possibility that people may hide their actual feelings** out of fear of government retribution, **high level of support of the regime in China was identified by various opinion surveys**, **including** a **Pew** Global **Research** in 2014, **which found 92 percent of Chinese respondents had confidence in Xi.**

The disengagement thesis also unwittingly uses the Soviet empire to draw an analogy with China. True, the CCP is “repeating some of the same mistakes that the Soviet Union made,” but **the resilience of China’s authoritarian state far surpasses that of the former Soviet Union, which it has already outlasted**. Economic historians remind us that even at its peak, the Soviet economy produced considerably less than half of the U.S. GDP. In 2019, however, **China’s GDP already amounted to two-thirds of the size of the U.S. economy. The GDP gap continues to shrink in China’s favor**. In the second quarter of this year, **China registered an economic growth of 3.2 percent compared to the same period a year ago.**

Furthermore, **Beijing has not lost its ability to respond to a crisis by mobilizing resources** **and bureaucratic capacities for high priority**. **The CCP’s commitment to ensuring its survival has been clearly demonstrated during** the **COVID**-19 pandemic. **The outbreak caused the most severe** social-political **crisis** **since** the 1989 **Tiananmen** crackdown. **Instead of allowing the crisis to become China’s** “**Chernobyl moment**,” however, **the CCP turned to a combination of traditional vehicles of the party-state and high-tech means** (e.g., big data and QR codes) **to contain the spread of the virus** relatively **quickly**.

By early April, **it was clear that Xi had emerged as a winner in the fight against the outbreak**. A series of national online surveys of urban residents in China, conducted by the UCSD China Data Lab, suggested that **the pandemic has beefed up government legitimacy**. On a scale of 1 to 10, **the average level of social trust in the central government increased** from 8.23 in June 2019 to 8.87 in May 2020. The percentage of respondents who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they prefer living under China’s political system as compared to others increased, too, from 70 percent in June 2019 to 83 percent in May 2020.

Xi might be a “true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology,” as Secretary Pompeo said, referring to Marxism, but **the Party nowadays increasingly relies on nationalism instead of communism alone as a pillar of its legitimacy. The failure of the U**nited **S**tates **to** effectively **handle the outbreak** **and its “bullying” approach have pushed nationalism and anti-Americanism to an all-time high in China**. Social media outlets in the country are saturated with comments and posts that portray the United States as a diminishing and hostile power. Social injustice, political polarization, and policy paralysis are undermining the United States’ role as a beacon of democracy for China. According to the same UCSD study, Chinese public’s views toward the United States in May 2020 were significantly more negative than those in June 2019. **A large percentage of the public, including those who are young and educated, now dislike** **and despise** **the U**nited **S**tates. **There is no natural constituency waiting to turn against the Party with the right prompts.**

Don’t get me wrong. I am not suggesting that the Chinese political system is superior to Western liberal democracies. **The Chinese system**, like the Soviet one, **is** fundamentally **flawed** and full of inherent contradictions. But as former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates reminded us, the system started to crumble only after Gorbachev took away the fear and terror it depends on to survive. **However, Xi is anybody but Gorbachev,** **and there is no indication that the Chinese regime will collapse anytime soon**. That is why we need to keep the competition peaceful and manageable. But decoupling policy not only risks a new Cold War, but also increases the chances of an actual war that results from an accidently sparked conflict involving the two militaries. The United States may still win a future cold (or even hot) war with China, but the cost would be way too high to justify considering it a viable policy option.

#### The public supports the CCP too much for the regime to become unstable

**Lo 20**, has been a Post columnist since 2012, covering major issues affecting Hong Kong and the rest of China. A journalist for 25 years, he has worked for various publications in Hong Kong and Toronto as a news reporter and editor. He has also lectured in journalism at the University of Hong Kong.. (Alex Lo, 7-19-2020, "Beijing enjoys greater legitimacy than any Western state", *South China Morning Post*, https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3093825/beijing-enjoys-greater-legitimacy-any-western-state)

Most Americans think with its democracy, the United States has the best form of government. China, with its one-party dictatorial state, communist or otherwise, has the worst form. This is China’s Achilles' heel and will spell the downfall of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In reality, **from the Chinese people’s perspective** and theirs alone, **their government** today **enjoys greater legitimacy** **and** **popularity** **than any American or Western government** with respect to their own citizens. Consider the latest “Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time” produced by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. **Based on eight surveys** conducted between 2003 and 2016, **and face-to-face interviews** **with more than** **31,000** **Chinese** urban and rural **residents**, **the satisfaction of the Chinese people with the central government was** as high as **93**.1 **per cent** in 2016, and that of the other three-level governments – provinces, cities and counties – was more than 70 per cent. By 2016, the Chinese government as a whole was more popular than at any time in the previous 20 years. But by an almost universal (mis)understanding, the US government represents the people and their interests while the Chinese government doesn’t. It’s this unshakeable presupposition that leads many outsiders to distinguish between the communist state and the Chinese people. It turns on the all-important question of political legitimacy and explains why top US officials nowadays don’t refer to the Chinese government but the Chinese Communist Party. It has become a common rhetorical strategy for US President Donald Trump, Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and any number of Pentagon generals and national security chiefs to draw a line between China’s leaders and its people. I would argue **it’s mainly because of this unshakeable presupposition among many Westerners** – and Hong Kong people – **that so many analysts and pundits consistently get China wrong**. **Their doom-and-gloom prognosis has been so consistent that people** who listen to them **are unfailingly surprised by how China, instead of collapsing**, **has achieved the greatest progress in economic development** and human betterment **in the shortest period of time in history – to become the second-largest economy.** You are free to hate and despise the Chinese state all you want, but **if you think it will collapse by its own weight** **because it lacks legitimacy or popular support, you will always be surprised** and never understand your enemy.

### Extend: “Leadership Turn”

#### US leadership is the greatest force for peace—letting China lead causes extinction

Keat 25, security and global affairs analyst and commentator based in Universiti Malaya. (Collins Chong Yew Keat, 5-15-2025, “The American-Led World System Saves Lives And Prevents Wars – OpEd” Eurasia Review, https://www.eurasiareview.com/15052025-the-american-led-world-system-saves-lives-and-prevents-wars-oped/) wtk

The Long Peace Must be Protected

Let’s be clear: the US-led order has been the greatest force for peace and human progress in modern history. The world has avoided a third world war that could end life on earth. Former enemies became allies. Over a billion people rose out of extreme poverty. Colonial empires ended, and a new era of long peace was maintained.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States and its democratic allies constructed a rules-based international order unlike any prior global system.

This Western-led order, grounded in the basis of collective security, open markets, the rule of law, and liberal values – has propelled an era of critical peace and prosperity.

The long peace enjoyed since the end of WWII, has been pillared on the strength and efficacy of both the world systems and institutional capacity created by the US and the West, and the values and deterrent power and might of the US in both preventing and stopping wars.

For nearly eight decades, no great-power war has engulfed the world, a stark contrast to the first half of the 20th century.

This long peace has been largely underappreciated despite the fact that we are living in the most peaceful period of modern time. This stability is a direct dividend of the Western-led international order established after 1945,but this is now at risk of being dismantled by the forces out to undermine the current Western led order, with the persistent and strategic undermining of the US rules based order.

Revisionist authoritarian powers seek to weaken the system of alliances and norms that has kept aggression in check. To understand how the US anchored order has preserved peace, saved lives, and deterred conflict, it is important to fist visualise how this order might be threatened by the current bandwagon of the world in ignoring this status quo of stability on the grounds of being smitten by the so called rise of the rest and the perceived inevitable decline of the West.

Contrary to these models and assumptions, the primary power and stability of the US and the West and their power supremacy have not ever been under threat by any of the rising powers out to challenge this primacy.

In all indicators of power, whether economic, military, technology, resources, demographics, and future trends, the US retains a significant power advantage, and no other power will come close to replacing this primacy in at least the next three decades.

However, this rules-based order and the long peace will be threatened if the world conveniently ignores it and if the US is weakened. For all its flaws,the Western-led order has been humanity’s best safeguard against global war and tyranny.

It has defeated totalitarian threats from fascism to communism to terror, protected the global commons and trade arteries, fostered unprecedented economic growth, saved lives through medical and technological inventions, prevented tyrannies and autocratic forces from unchecked human rights abuses, and championed humanitarian values.

All these make the case that the American-led rules-based system has been our time’s most important global force for peace and security.

The Long Peace Dividend: Deterrence, Democracy, and Rule of Law

The most overlooked achievement of this long peace and Western order is the prevention of another catastrophic world war. Before 1945, great-power conflicts were common with the likes of the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, World War II, and countless earlier wars among empires.

World War II alone killed an estimated 70–85 million people (about 3% of the world’s population. The US-led initiatives to establish a new world order based on democracy and institutional governance, with the likes of the United Nations, NATO, and the Bretton Woods systems, helped to prevent conflicts and to minimise damages.

US military strength and nuclear deterrence dissuade any would-be aggressors from launching global war.

In essence, a dominant democratic superpower acted as a stabiliser, where the hegemonic stability theory helped to keep peace and deter wars.

Conflict-related deaths have fallen dramatically from mid-20th-century levels, reflecting the long peace under the post-WWII international order.

By the 21st century, war deaths worldwide had dropped to historically low rates – in most years, conflict killed fewer than 1 in 700 people globally. The avoidance of another great-power war is the chief reason. The Cold War ended without direct superpower combat. The post-1945 great-power stability has twice outlasted the interwar period and is the longest period of stability among the great powers in centuries. The international order anchored by U.S.-led alliances, nuclear deterrence, and democratic norms created a balance that made large-scale war infeasible. Hence, the world has reaped the reward in hundreds of millions of lives not lost to war.

Of parallel importance is the spread of democracy and the rule of law, which has created more peaceful relations: democracies rarely fight one another, as reflected in the democratic peace theory.

Countries that share the values of democracy and rule of law through institutions like the EU or U.S. alliances have virtually eliminated the likelihood of conflict among themselves. Western Europe, once the ground zero for two world wars, has seen 77 years without war between major states.

This has moved us away from the notion of might is right to a time when independent and sovereign nations would respect each other’s rights and rules, but this has now come under increasing threat without the US led prevailing power stabiliser if other powers continue to undermine this.

The Western liberal order won the 20th century, making democracy and free markets the prevailing paradigm worldwide. Millions in Eastern Europe were freed from dictatorship and the Cold War ended with the expansion of freedom and democracy and a liberal economic order that has seen the global economic progress today.

From fascism to communism to terrorism, the Western-led order has preserved the lives and freedoms of billions of people – those rescued from tyrannies, and those never caught in wars that were avoided.

As John Kennedy once said, “A mankind that has managed to avoid war is one that will find prosperity and progress.” The Western order has embodied that maxim. Defending free nations and deterring aggressors ensured that the latter half of the 20th century was far less bloody than the first. It is difficult to imagine any alternative system achieving the same record.

America as Global Policeman: Securing the Seas and Skies

American military preeminence has formed the global security backbone that all nations benefit from. On the high seas, the U.S. Navy has ensured freedom of navigation and the safety of maritime commerce for decades. The U.S. Navy’s dominance of the world’s oceans has made it as an indispensable guarantor of global trade, as 90% of global trade by volume travels by sea. Under Pax Americana those sea lanes have remained largely open and peaceful. No other power comes even close in having this capacity and might to ensure global peace and maritime order.

U.S. and allied naval forces patrol choke points like the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Strait of Malacca to deter blockades or piracy.

This resulted in energy supplies and goods flowing relatively freely, fueling the world economy. The US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and Seventh Fleet in the Pacific act as constant stabilising presence in critical regions.

American-led security of the seas has been a true global public good – one often taken for granted. The US naval umbrella not only secures trade but also allows countries to forgo building massive navies of their own, thereby reducing arms races.

The stability of shipping routes enables astonishing expansion of global commerce, where exports as a share of world GDP quadrupled from about 5% in 1945 to over 20% by the 2000s, reflecting how much more interconnected the world economy became under a US protected trading system.

China benefited from this new economic order and the stability and security of the market system and the maritime route that are critical for its export oriented economy.

Beyond the seas, the US continued to lead in policing global airspace and outer space. The US Air Force’s global reach deters rogue states from threatening civilian aviation and American GPS satellites provide navigation free-of-charge worldwide, but borne by American taxpayers.

Prosperity Through Stability: Unprecedented Global Development

The Western-led order created conditions for a surge in global prosperity, lifting billions out of poverty and transforming the economic landscape. In 1950, much of Europe and Asia were still in ruins as a result of the wars and most of the world’s population lived in poverty. Today, the world economy is roughly $100 trillion in size. Global GDP per capita has tripled since 1945. Life expectancy worldwide has jumped from about 45 years in 1950 to over 72 years now, owing to better nutrition, healthcare, and technology diffusion. These gains were not inevitable, but rather they were nurtured by the Western system’s open markets, financial aid, and technological leadership.

Beyond the Marshall Plan, institutions like the World Bank funded infrastructure and industrial projects in developing nations.

The security provided by the US led peace allowed countries to spend resources on development rather than defense. Europe could demilitarise compared to its past. Japan, shielded by the US alliance, devoted itself entirely to economic growth, with minimal military spending.

Both China and India, which remained poor through the Cold War, saw spectacular economic rises in the 1990s to 2000s by integrating into the US led international economy.

China’s export-driven boom, lifting 800 million people out of poverty, and this was facilitated by access to Western markets and adherence to Western-devised rules of trade and investment.

The numbers of people living in extreme poverty worldwide dropped substantially. In 1990, more than 1.9 billion people, or 36% of the world’s population, lived under the World Bank’s extreme poverty line. By 2019, that number had fallen to about 650 million or around 8% of the population. Over 1 billion people lifted out of extreme poverty in one generation, where the stability and openness of the post-Cold War international order allowed capital and goods to reach more places, creating jobs and raising incomes.

The Western-led international order has been the first to act in cases of genocide, famine, or natural disaster, securing the sanctity of life. From the concept of responsibility to protect, to providing non-military humanitarian leadership, the order has sustained basic human principles and sanctity of life.

The New Threat: Autocratic Revisionism and the Erosion of Order

This order is now under threat, where the global pivot toward anti-US will unravel the fabric of international law and norms that have kept the peace. From China’s open defiance of maritime law in Asia to the constant undermining of the global financial and American security support, these create the buy in for a post-American order that new forces might lead if the US is weakened, but the new order would be far less stable, less free, and potentially more hazardous and risky for there is no precedent and no global experience for any of these new powers in even experiencing any form of pervasive global security and economic management, what more to lead the world in revising the old rules.

Replacing rule-of-law principles with raw power politics will endanger the world and push it back to the dangerous anarchic era of might is right.

The revisionist ideology will weaken the institutional deterrence, putting the world into a more dangerous phase of non abidance and non adherence to the rules based order, where affiliation will be based on economic entanglement and appeasement to the higher power based on the hard power threats.

The diminished role for international law will create spiralling security dilemma, arms races and a free for all where anarchy prevails in a survival-of-the-strongest era. The constraints and deterrence on war and abuse built up over 75 years, could deteriorate and erode quickly if this revisionist momentum is not checked.

The world would be entering a period of high risk, just like the unstable decades before 1914 or 1939, but with far deadlier weapons in play.

History serves painful lessons of what happens when global orders are overturned by aggressive powers. The world sleepwalked from the Concert of Europe into World War I; the failure of the League of Nations in the 1930s led to World War II.

Defending the Greatest Peace System in History

Defending the rules-based order does not mean resisting change or being blindly rooted to the conventional systemic approach, but reforms and changes can be made. Notwithstanding that, core facets must remain.

These include the notions that aggression is unacceptable, genocides and human rights abuses will never be tolerated, that all nations are bound by common laws, and that democracy and human dignity are worth protecting.

The order can endure and adapt as long as these ideals remain at the forefront of the Western alliance. If they are abandoned, we risk descending into an era of darkness again.

For all its flaws, the current global order dominated by the single Western power parity is still the best bet in preventing aggression, saving lives, and inventing new progress for mankind.

#### China is the largest threat to the peaceful international order

Crane and Brands 25, \*journalist, \*\*Professor of Global Affairs at the Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, and a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. (\*Brent Crane, interviewing \*\*Hal Brands, 3-11-2025, “Hal Brands on the Axis of Autocracies” https://chinabooksreview.com/2025/03/11/hal-brands/) wtk

That brings us to the so-called “axis of resistance” or “axis of autocracies.” What is that?

Different people call this thing by different names. Basically what it refers to is the thickening web of strategic ties among the states that are most aggressively challenging the international system. These relationships date back decades in many cases. But they have grown and they have flourished in the context of the wars in Ukraine and, more recently, the Middle East. These wars have created a hothouse geopolitical environment. They have encouraged the Eurasian autocracies — China, Russia, Iran, North Korea — to forge closer ties so that they can join together for purposes of both self-protection and geopolitical predation. And while these relationships don’t look like America’s alliances, they have a bunch of important strategic effects. They encourage disruptive military innovation. They help Russia sustain its war in Ukraine. They reduce the isolation that aggressive states would otherwise face. So they have a variety of effects, all of which are quite disruptive from the perspective of the United States and its allies.

What role does China play in this axis?

China is the most formidable of the Eurasian autocracies. It poses, in my view, the greatest threat to the survival of the U.S.-led world order. That’s true certainly in East Asia, where the Chinese military challenge is most severe. But it’s true on a global scale as well. Look at how China is trying to make itself the international economic and technological heavyweight of the 21st century. At the same time, China plays a key role in strengthening the other Eurasian autocracies. Even though a lot of attention has rightly been paid to the fact that Iran and North Korea have contributed weapons (and, in North Korea’s case, troops) in support of Russia’s war in Ukraine, there’s no way Putin could have sustained the war for so long without his economic relationship with China. China has helped to rebuild Russia’s defense industrial base. It has provided an outlet for Russian goods. It has become increasingly intertwined with Russia economically, financially and technologically. So China is, by itself, the most formidable of the autocracies, and also the one that helps intensify the threats the others pose.

Yet, out of all of these states, China is the one we’re most intertwined with. Trade and peer-to-peer relationships with Chinese companies are still pretty robust. What’s the evidence that China wants to upend the U.S.-led order from which it benefits so much?

Yes, China is the most intertwined with the existing world order and it has the most to lose if that order is disrupted. After all, China is still dependent on the global economy. It’s still dependent on technological inputs from the United States and other Western countries, although it’s trying to reduce that dependence urgently. China has also not challenged the system as violently as Russia or Iran have in the last couple of years.

But if you look at China’s aims, it’s hard to reconcile them with the international system as we know it. That’s true if you look just at China’s territorial claims against its neighbors. The Greater China that Xi Jinping is trying to put together includes Hong Kong and Taiwan but it also includes about 90% of the South China Sea; a chunk of India that’s the size of a small European country; and a bunch of other revanchist aims in the Asian littoral and mainland.

There’s also the fact that China is pretty clearly looking for an exclusive sphere of influence in East Asia — “Asia for Asians,” as Xi Jinping called it about a decade ago. Not necessarily one in which China physically dominates the region, but one in which its preferences have to be obeyed and cannot be challenged. And one in which the U.S. is essentially booted to the sidelines of the region.

On a global scale, China also seeks a very different distribution of power. When Chinese officials or propagandists talk about China’s “great rejuvenation”, they are referring to a situation in which China is once again the most advanced, most respected, most powerful country in the world as, in the Chinese narrative, it was for many, many centuries prior to the onset of the century of humiliation in the 1800s.

That doesn’t mean that China is going to create a Sinocentric international order that looks exactly like the American-led international order. I’m sure it will be different in many respects. But just listening to what Chinese leaders say, it’s harder and harder to deny that China seeks a world in which power balances have changed, and in which China has an increasing ability to write the rules of the road in the 21st century in the way that the U.S. wrote them in the 20th.

#### Eighty years of history prove American Leadership is key to global peace

Zakaria 25, foreign affairs columnist for The Post. (Fareed Zakaria, 3-7-2025, “Trump upending world order will cost America dearly” https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/03/07/america-declining-influence-russia-china/) wtk

To those who think it’s high time that we changed an international system that was so dependent on the United States — have you weighed the costs and benefits? The United States spent eight decades building an international system of rules, norms and values that has produced the longest period of great power peace and global prosperity in human history. Its alliances are the greatest force multiplier for its influence around the world. The United States has been the greatest beneficiary of this system, even now, decades later, still setting the agenda and dominating the world economically, technologically and militarily. As that world unravels, America’s privileged position will also decline, creating a more dangerous and impoverished world — and a more isolated, mistrusted and insecure America.

#### There’s no peace without US leadership

Crane and Brands 25, \*journalist, \*\*Professor of Global Affairs at the Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, and a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. (\*Brent Crane, interviewing \*\*Hal Brands, 3-11-2025, “Hal Brands on the Axis of Autocracies” https://chinabooksreview.com/2025/03/11/hal-brands/) wtk

Turning to solutions, how should Washington strengthen the liberal order against these revisionist powers, especially at a time when isolationism, or something like it, is on the rise in America?

We have to recognize that there is no stable balance of power in Eurasia without the engagement of the United States. The history of the 20th century showed that only America had the capacity to stabilize the key regions of Eurasia, to protect them against aggression from without and also to tamp down on the conflicts within them that had previously torn those regions apart. Nothing has changed dramatically enough since the 20th century to suggest that Eurasia will be able to keep its own balance if the U.S. drops out.

### Extend: “No Taiwan War”

#### China can’t go to war over Taiwan—Interdependence, military risks, and the Silicon Shield check.

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The recent Taiwanese elections have reignited international political discourse on the possibility of war in the Taiwan Strait. Given the historical complexities of Taiwan-China relations and the role they play in U.S. foreign policy, many U.S. foreign policy (USFP) experts are predicting imminent conflict in the region. However, this is a significant miscalculation of Beijing’s appetite for war. USFP officials commonly misinterpret Chinese domestic politics and dynamics, especially concerning Taiwan. Furthermore, almost two years after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, USFP commentators still falsely draw parallels between Ukraine and Taiwan and underestimate the power of Taiwan’s “Silicon Shield.”

Xi’s rhetoric on Taiwan is strategic political posturing

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s stated intention to reunite Taiwan with China is closely tied to his desire to consolidate power over the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Early in his tenure, Xi has strategically cultivated support within the CCP to dismantle presidential term limits, diverging from Deng Xiaoping’s tradition of orderly and institutionalized power transitions. In his address during the CCP’s centenary ceremony, he affirmed his policy of pursuing peaceful national reunification but did not reveal the timeline for doing so. This omission implies that Xi’s discourse serves primarily as a mechanism to solidify internal CCP support, rather than as a definitive roadmap for action. Bang Xiao, a reporter and analyst on Chinese affairs, postulates that showing ambition to take Taiwan will “cement Xi’s place as a remarkable person in China’s history” – indicating how his ambitious messaging on Taiwanese reunification is a political power play. The possibility of reunifying Taiwan and China is an emotive issue for Chinese citizens. Xi’s rhetoric is pandering to these emotions to appeal to his citizens and engender support within the CCP, without clearly signaling a commitment to actualize the reunification of China and Taiwan.

Furthermore, Beijing recognises that invading Taiwan would result in international isolation and condemnation, including but not limited to sanctions and embargoes from Western nations. This could reverse Beijing’s efforts to expand power and influence, and dampen Xi’s global ambitions. Economic interdependence is China’s key vulnerability, since the CCP’s legitimacy rests on its ability to maintain social, political and economic stability within China and its trade and economic stability rests on the global market.

China and Taiwan do not mirror Russia and Ukraine

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine a year ago has led many USFP commentators to draw a comparison to China’s approach toward Taiwan; however, Russia’s direct military aggression contrasts with China’s blend of diplomatic pressure and military preparedness. Although the war in Ukraine is a stark reminder that the threat of cross-border conflicts is omnipresent, Taiwan and Ukraine differ geopolitically, historically and strategically. The only real parallel is that both countries are exposed to a large, aggressive authoritarian neighbor. Taiwan is separated from China by the 180 km long Taiwan Strait, compared to the long land border between Russia and Ukraine. An invasion by China would be logistically more arduous than Russia’s invasion into Ukraine and would require a large number of ships heavily laden with equipment, which would be vulnerable to attacks. The slow pace of these vessels would expose them to long-range missile strikes, submarine assaults, and other forms of advanced weaponry. Harlan Ullman, a senior advisor at the Atlantic Council, emphasizes that to counter Taiwan’s potential 45,000 defense force, China would need to mobilize over 1.2 million soldiers from its active military personnel, which exceeds 2 million. However, the Chinese Navy possesses only a fraction of the necessary artillery to facilitate an invasion of that magnitude.

In addition, due to the historical association between Taiwan and the U.S., as enshrined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. is the island’s primary security partner. This heightens the global consequences of conflict between China and Taiwan, to a far greater extent than the war in Ukraine. Regardless of China’s increasing military assertiveness, the U.S.’ de facto alliance with Taiwan acts as “diplomatic deterrence” against China. The Center for Strategic International Studies’ military experts even predict total destruction of an invading Chinese militia by a U.S.-led coalition before any occupation of Taiwan could occur.

Contrary to what might be inferred from Moscow and Beijing’s announcement of a no-limits partnership, the two states also follow different strategies to advance their interests. China’s strategic priority of peaceful unification with Taiwan follows the dream of a one-China principle, and Chinese rhetoric stresses the maintenance of a peaceful environment while pursuing its historical mission of territorial expansion. In line with this, China has emphasized soft economic inducements as much as hard diplomatic and military pressure. By contrast, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was an aggressive attempt to secure its “near abroad” and counter NATO’s expansion – an aim driven by Moscow’s perception of a swiftly deteriorating strategic environment. This fostered a sense of urgency and hardened Moscow’s appetite for war.

Taiwan’s “Silicon Shield”

Many USFP commentators predict that China will invade Taiwan to assume control of its cutting-edge microchip and semiconductor industry. However, this industry, home to 92% of the world’s most advanced production of semiconductors, acts as a “Silicon Shield” against the possibility of an invasion as global economic dependence on this technology magnifies the importance of peace and stability. China imports 40% of the global supply of semiconductors and, even though it invests heavily in its domestic capability, relies on Taiwanese production to prop up its booming $228.30 billion electronics industry.

Furthermore, China mines 72% of the world’s silicon, an integral component for semiconductors, which illustrates the interdependence of China and Taiwan’s economies. Beijing is highly strategic and understands that even a Chinese naval blockade would severely restrict trade, exacerbating global economic tensions, causing dramatic supply-chain disruptions and leading to trillion dollar losses in economic output. At worst, military conflict would risk destroying Taiwan’s semiconductor industry and seriously harm China’s own economy.

While USFP commentators should not underestimate the potential for Chinese military expansion, they should also understand the nuances in Beijing’s posture towards Taiwan. A false interpretation of Chinese domestic politics could result in inaccurate comparisons between Russia-Ukraine and China-Taiwan that could, in turn, provoke USFP actions that overstep China’s red line.