

China is the challenge of our time—and the United States must get to grips with the totality of the competitive challenge in all its dimensions.

–DAVID SHAMBAUGH

Toward a “Smart Competition” Strategy for U.S. China Policy

David Shambaugh

“For any administration, China is in its own category—too big to ignore, too repressive to embrace, difficult to influence, and very, very proud.”

—Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary* (2003, p. 430)

The U.S.-China relationship and American policy toward China have rarely been in as much tumult as over the past three years. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this is due to some new or recent development—such as President Trump or his administration. To be certain, the Trump administration’s trade war and overall confrontational posture toward China has been a significant contributing factor. But the Chinese side has also contributed to the deterioration through its own actions. Moreover, the American side views its toughened policies toward China as *retaliation* against it for many years of transgressions.

When viewed over this longer period of time, the relationship experienced secular decline throughout the Obama years. In this perspective, the current fraught state of relations is the culmination of a decade or more of deterioration and cumulative strains. It did not occur overnight, is not temporary, and can be expected to endure indefinitely. Therefore, a comprehensive competitive relationship filled with frictions (with some elements of cooperation) is the “new normal.” This chapter seeks to understand the sources, and map the parameters, of this state of relations—while identifying a roadmap for pursuing a “smart competition” strategy vis-à-vis China.

Understanding the Deterioration of Sino-U.S. Relations

On the American side, during this ten-year period, a variety of constituencies became progressively more frustrated with Chinese behavior in their respective professional spheres: the U.S. military, diplomats, educators, members of Congress, media and journalists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of a wide variety, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and the business community. Even among experienced foreign policy practitioners there has been a rather considerable rethinking. These growing frustrations with trying to carry on what should be normal cooperative interactions with Chinese counterparts (based on the theory of “engagement”) have resulted in a progressive groundswell of antipathy and a shift in attitudes about China among these constituencies and across the country.

The consequence of this national *gestalt* has been a sea change in American thinking about China. This has led to a lively and healthy debate, befitting of a robust democracy.¹ This is how foreign policy can—and should—be shaped by domestic constituencies in a democracy. Doing what the American policy community does so well, it churns out a tsunami of “task force” reports, advocacy papers, journal articles, op-eds, and speeches. While a broadly agreed upon new consensus has yet to fully emerge, and the China policy debates in Washington and across the foreign policy community nationally remain contested and divisive, some themes and cleavages have crystallized.

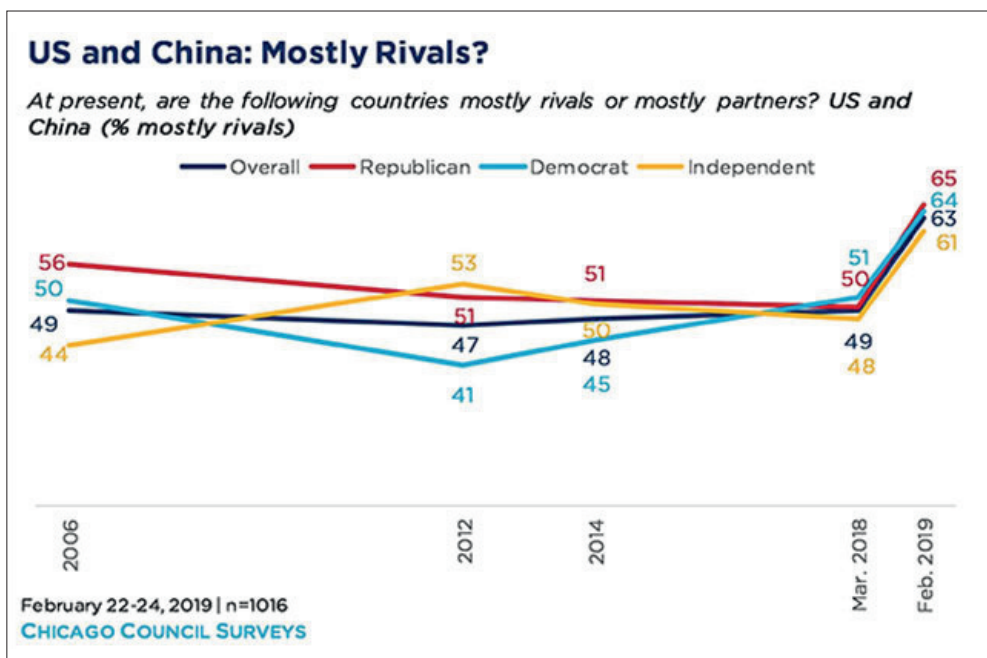
For most, and particularly on Capitol Hill, there has been an evident and widely shared shift toward advocating a “tougher” and more “competitive” strategy, as China is now viewed as a strategic rival.² The Trump administration and its National Security Strategy both reflect and drive this hardened perspective.³ The Trump administration consequently has pursued a “whole-of-government” hardline approach towards China—as spelled out publicly by Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Pompeo, and others.⁴

Another distinguished group of specialists and former officials sought out a less confrontational and more middle ground of “smart competition” in a task force report published by the Asia Society.⁵ This chapter is in the vein of that report (of which I was a member).

Some have questioned the fundamental assumptions concerning “constructive engagement” that have undergirded and driven U.S. policy for nearly half a century and across nine presidencies.⁶ If engagement was intended to liberalize China in multiple dimensions, then it has been deemed a relative failure (not only politically, but economically and socially as well). However, some others have pushed back by making the case that the purpose of engagement was never to liberalize China, but rather to advance American interests. They argue for continued “engagement” and eschewing a confrontational approach to Beijing.⁷ Those advocating this perspective includes a group of more than 100 distinguished former officials and China scholars who published an “open letter” to the Trump administration in July 2019.⁸ They laid blame for the deteriorated relationship primarily at the doorstep of the Trump administration, and they bemoaned its deterioration. This triggered a counter-letter signed by many conservatives and former military officers.⁹ Even the Committee on the Present Danger has been resurrected from the ashes of the Cold War with a new mission: China.¹⁰

China also seems to be the one policy area where there is also considerable bipartisan consensus and a shared approach between Congress and the executive branch in this administration.¹¹ A broad swath of congressional representatives and senators alike agree on a toughened China policy, while the US-China Congressional Working Group (which generally advocates engagement) has been marginalized. Multiple pieces of legislation critical of China are pending and have been passed in Congress, and enjoy cross-aisle sponsorship.

The new anti-China zeitgeist is also reflected in an apparent overall shift in public opinion. According to a recent Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey, there has been a sharp uptick in the number of Americans who view China as a “rival.”¹²

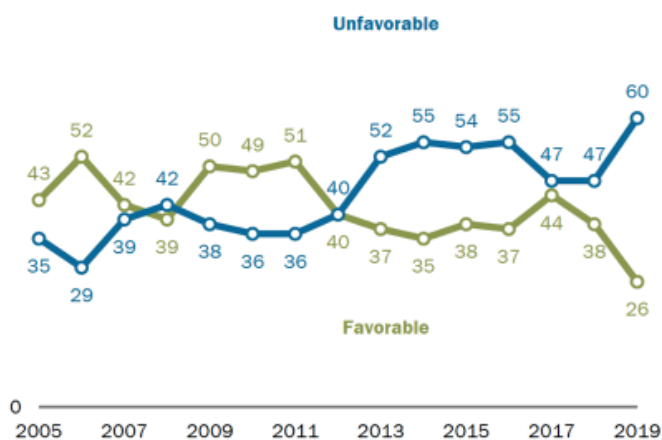


A recent Pew poll shows a similar sharp deterioration in American attitudes of China.¹³

Share of Americans who have unfavorable view of China reaches new high

% who say they have a ___ opinion of China

100%



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b.

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Throughout all of this, many of us who have spent our professional lives and careers working on China, in and out of government, and participating in the ongoing China policy debates over the decades, have had to reexamine our long-held beliefs and positions (those who haven't should). Like the broader shift described above, my own views of China have also hardened in recent years. While I have always tried to approach China in a practical fashion and as a scholar, I have also done my best to think of China in terms of the American national interest. There are many reasons—including my own personal experiences—for the evolution in my own thinking and advocacy of a toughened approach, but a principal one is China itself. The China that the United States and the world have been dealing with since about 2010 has undertaken some qualitatively new and negative turns: becoming much more repressive domestically and expansionist abroad.

I thus have now come to believe that China is *challenging* the United States on multiple fronts, is an actual *threat* in some, and is a *competitor* and *rival* in most policy areas. While I view China as a *competitor* and *rival*, it is not (yet) an *adversary* or *enemy*. The task ahead, for both countries, is to “manage competition” while preventing the emergence of a fully adversarial relationship.

I now believe that the United States and China have entered a lengthy and indefinite period of *comprehensive competition*. I hasten to add that “competition” is not a code word for confrontation or containment. Competition means just that—to compete with China on all fronts. Simply using the term “strategic competition” is insufficient—because to many “strategic” primarily signifies the military/security domain—while today's competition between the U.S. and China affects multiple realms: military/security, political systems, diplomacy, economic/commercial, ideology, values, media, culture and soft power, governance practices, public diplomacy and “influence operations,”

espionage, technology, innovation, Indo-Pacific regional and global competition in all of the aforementioned areas, and in some international institutions and areas of “global governance.” In *every one* of these areas, the United States and China find themselves in disagreement and competition for advantages and influence vis-à-vis the other. In each area, China is a *competitor* and *rival* of the United States and must be dealt with as such. This is an increasingly intensified dynamic, although *not yet* a zero-sum one in all domains.

Compete First, Cooperate Second

Recognizing that this is now a primarily competitive relationship, as delineated below, we must also recognize that there remain some areas of important potential *cooperation* between the United States and China—primarily in the arena of “global governance.” This includes working together with China on global economic stability, counter-terrorism, climate change, pandemics, sea lane security, nuclear nonproliferation, regional security and peacekeeping, counter-narcotics production and smuggling, managing migration, and other transnational problems. These are significant and important issues, on which the United States and China (together with others in the international community) should always try to collaborate. Bilateral and multilateral bureaucratic efforts should be made to forge cooperation where possible in these areas. In this respect, the Trump administration’s withdrawal from treaties and disinclination to working with China (and others) on global governance issues has been very deleterious and damaging. If there is one “good news” story in Chinese diplomacy during Xi Jinping’s tenure, it is that China has really “stepped up” in this sphere, but the bad news is that the United States has “stepped down.”¹⁴

The United States and China are also bound tightly together through extensive webs of interdependence: commerce, students, tourists, travel, migration, telecommunications, technologies, and some areas of security. These are *mutually beneficial* and bring tangible gains to the United States. These ties are the real foundation and fabric of the Sino-American relationship, and they help buffer the stresses and strains encountered in other areas. They are a reality that cannot be undone. “Decoupling” the U.S.-China societal relationship is both unrealistic and undesirable.¹⁵

Recognizing the potential for limited cooperation in global governance areas where our national interests overlap, I also agree with Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan that “Washington should avoid being the eager suitor on transnational challenges.”¹⁶ I also agree with them that placing competition over cooperation (what they call “sequencing”) makes practical sense. The United States has many more *differences* with China than things in common. As such, a strategy of “competing first and cooperating second” is realistic and prudent.¹⁷

Yet, no matter how competitive and fraught the U.S.-China relationship is, we can never stop engaging in *dialogue* with Chinese interlocutors at all levels, bilaterally and multilaterally. The dialogues may not always be fulfilling on our side (often not), as the Chinese tend to reflexively adhere to their talking points, use formulaic slogans (口号), are sometimes rude and scolding, and eschew flexibility or real give-and-take. But cutting off dialogue is counterproductive. That said, constant reevaluation and retooling the formats of such dialogues is always a good idea. For example, the Trump administration’s suspension of the Strategic & Economic Dialogue was appropriate. That dialogue consumed enormous bureaucratic time and financial resources with minimal pay-off, as actual implementation of the lengthy communiqués foundered.

The Road Ahead

If this is the background to how U.S. relations with China got to where they are now, where are we going in American policy toward China? To invoke Lenin, what is to be done? And how to get there? If, as I argue, the United States and China are engaged in *indefinite comprehensive competition*, then how should the U.S. proceed?

Before identifying some specific recommendations for a strategy of “smart competition,” let me make several general observations.

First, “competition” is not a dirty word or an illicit concept. It is *not* the opposite of cooperation. Competition is just that: to compete. Competition is indeed a very healthy part of human life. Competition is intrinsic to the economic/commercial marketplace, to the intellectual “marketplace of ideas,” to scientific and technological research, to sports teams, even to individuals “competing against nature.” Competition is hardwired into American DNA, and Americans believe that competition brings out the best in us.

To use the metaphor of sports, to be effective in a competition one must play to one’s own strengths and defend and shore up one’s weaknesses while identifying and exploiting the opposition’s weaknesses and not playing into their strengths. To effectively counter the opposition, good and accurate scouting (intelligence) as well as rigorous training is required. You also need a game plan—which is proactive and not reactive, understands temporal flow and when to deploy certain assets, and is not overly punishing (the art of diplomacy is allowing the other party an “off ramp”). There may be limits to the metaphor of sports for the real world of competition in international relations—but I also think there are instructive parallels.

I thus advocate that the United States *embrace comprehensive competition* with China! We should not shy away from it or think it is some kind of negative approach simply because it is not of the Kantian paradigm of cooperation with which we may be accustomed or prefer. We are again living in a more Realist age of great power rivalry.¹⁸ We need to throw off the mental and policy shackles that lead us to instinctively think solely in terms of “engagement,” diplomacy, and cooperation¹⁹—and, rather, adopt a much more tough-minded and competitive mindset.²⁰ Doing so requires a higher tolerance for friction in the relationship and not an illusory search for “stability.”²¹ Sometimes competition requires confrontation.

Second, comprehensive competition requires a comprehensive strategy. The elements need to interrelate and be parts of a broad holistic strategy. Ad hoc and uncoordinated efforts will be far less successful than those that follow a design and set of thought-through purposes. “Whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approaches are to be encouraged. “Pushback” in itself is *not* a strategy, although it is a principal *tactic* of competition.²² The United States *must* work in tandem and effectively with Asian, European, and other countries vis-à-vis China.

Third, while the U.S.-China competitive rivalry is not exactly the same as Cold War 1.0, it is worthwhile to revisit and “dust off” the previous toolboxes and playbooks used by the United States during the Cold War. Some Chinese tactics—such as “united front” and disinformation operations, technological and other types of espionage, cultivating intelligence assets in the U.S. government, development of asymmetric weapons, global military deployments, cultivation of client states and proxies, and two-against-one “strategic triangle” maneuvering—were all staples of the USSR/CPSU, and our tactics for combatting them vis-à-vis China could benefit from drawing on earlier experiences and practices.²³ In many real ways, the organization and behavior of the Chinese communist party-state remains a Soviet byproduct (I have always told my students: “to understand China, you need to understand the Soviet Union first”). We also have prior experience competing with China during the Cold War, which is instructive.²⁴

While these negative elements of Soviet/Chinese behavior are still very relevant, so too are the *cooperative* dimensions of the Cold War—diplomatic détente, arms control agreements, military confidence-building measures (CBMs), Track II dialogues, etc. Yet, I also agree with Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan that while some instruments from the Cold War may be reusable, equating China with the Soviet Union is not applicable. While they have several similarities, there are also fundamental differences. As Campbell and Sullivan observe: “China today is a peer competitor that is more formidable economically, more sophisticated diplomatically, and more flexible ideologically than the Soviet Union ever was.”²⁵ I would add to this list that China is thoroughly institutionally integrated into the international system, while the Soviet Union was not.

How to Compete Smartly with China?

Moving from broad guidelines to more targeted ones, what follows are ten recommendations for how the United States can effectively and “smartly” compete with China.

1. **The best defense is an offense.** *Be proactive.* Develop targeted policies and actions to counter and offset China’s presence and malign activities worldwide. China’s mere presence in, and influence on, other countries should be seen as a challenge to American interests. The United States has been a global power since the Second World War and should remain so. If we are in a competition for global influence with the world’s other major power, and China is now truly a global power,²⁶ then we need to invest in resources to counter China and to offer other countries alternatives to China.

This is particularly true for *priority regions*: throughout the western hemisphere (Caribbean, Central and South America), throughout Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, central and southeastern Europe, and Africa. Some of these alternatives can be American, whereas in other areas—such as building infrastructure—we can rely on Japanese, European, or other allies and partners to provide alternatives. No nation wants to be beholden to China (as is increasingly evident along the “Belt and Road”), and *all* seek multiple external partners. The U.S. approach should be to dilute and frustrate China’s attempts to create client states, create regional spheres of interest, lock up resources, and become hegemonic.

2. In order to do this, we need to **develop systematic and comprehensive knowledge about China’s activities worldwide.** Our intelligence agencies and *every* U.S. embassy in the world should prioritize tracking China’s activities,²⁷ and this information needs to be pooled by the National Intelligence Council (NIC) and fed into an interagency process that should determine effective counteractions to be taken by different U.S. Government departments and agencies around the world.
3. **Coordinate closely with allies and work with a wide range of partner countries.** Many countries around the world have anxieties about China, they are growing in number, and this can be used to American advantage. As Campbell and Sullivan note: “The United States needs to get back to seeing alliances as assets to be invested in rather than costs to be cut. In the absence of any meaningful capacity to rebuild its own network of capable allies, Beijing would like nothing more than for the United States to squander this long-term advantage.”²⁸

In competing with China worldwide, it would be a profound *mistake* to ask or push countries to “choose” between the two (the U.S. over China). That would be, as the Singaporean foreign minister has observed, an “invidious choice.”²⁹ Most countries seek to have positive relations with both Washington *and* Beijing. The U.S. needs to “help them hedge.” The United States has a strong hand to play, but it is being damaged by the current administration’s “America First” approach to diplomacy, trade, and security. We cannot bash our allies and partners and then turn around and expect them to work with us in countering China. Also, several of our alliances—notably with Thailand, the Philippines, and South Korea—need real shoring up, and China has made significant inroads in each case. Further, China has a much larger presence across Africa and is eroding the U.S. footprint in Latin America. Remedial efforts are urgent in these regions.

4. **Be confident and exhibit it.** The United States possesses many strengths to bring to the competition with China, but we currently exhibit confusion, dysfunction, self-doubt, and weakness domestically. Externally, we have a much longer history of relations with most countries than the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and a greater network of formal allies (thirty-eight), while China has one (North Korea). The U.S. also has many non-allied security partners, while China provides little in the military realm to others. Security assistance is one of America’s real comparative advantages vis-à-vis China. U.S. corporations also have a much better reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR), transparency, and lack of corruption than

their Chinese counterparts. Similarly, many U.S. aid (ODA) programs compare favorably with Chinese ones.³⁰ Concerning soft power and cultural exchange more broadly, the U.S. again possesses many strengths vis-à-vis China.³¹ The U.S. also possesses many other admirable attributes but none more important than its *openness*.

But we also need to **rebuild at home**. This is obvious, but it requires restating and reminding. Our long-term competition with China will only be successful if we invest in core elements of competitiveness here in the United States—education, science and technology, innovation, infrastructure, finance, young people, etc.³² And we need to remain firmly committed to and practice our liberal democratic political values.³³ We will not be a role model for other countries and peoples, and effectively compete with the appeal of China’s authoritarian model, if the United States’ political system is dysfunctional, if we cannot conquer the existing racism and sexism in our society, if we cannot narrow the income gap, if we cannot rebuild our infrastructure, and if we do not correct other maladies that compromise the American Example.

5. **Invest in, and dramatically ramp up, U.S. public diplomacy efforts.** Among other arenas, the U.S.-China global competition is being waged in—and to a significant extent may be determined in—the *public information domain*. We live in an unprecedented, instantaneous information age. To be successful in the competition with China, the U.S. *must* effectively influence the international narratives *about China*—its domestic and international behaviors—as well as the narratives about the United States. Perceptions matter, a lot.

This involves both governmental public diplomacy and nongovernmental media, as well as cultural exchange programs. In some regions—notably Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa—China is already dominating regional media. In these regions, China is simultaneously *daily news* and is *providing* the news via feeds from Xinhua and other PRC state media sources,³⁴ while the United States is covered infrequently and its media feeds are too expensive for many foreign outlets to subscribe to. Moreover, the reporting on China is overwhelmingly positive—while reporting on the U.S. tends to be *negative*.

The Department of State’s Global Engagement Center has begun to focus on this issue and is mounting an effort to counter Chinese propaganda worldwide, but the State Department’s Bureau of Public Diplomacy is woefully under-resourced and lacks strategic thinking concerning China. Public diplomacy officers in the field really need to step up their games and proactively promote the value and contributions of the United States in their countries/regions while raising public concerns about Chinese practices. There may also be a role for U.S. intelligence services in this area.

6. **At home and abroad, China’s “influence activities” also need to be carefully monitored and countered.** This is a relatively new issue on the U.S.-China agenda (as well as for other countries). It is real and is not “fake news.” As the Hoover Institution/Asia Society’s publication, *China’s Influence & American Interests*, amply demonstrates,³⁵ the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), government, military, state security, media, and other official organs are investing heavily and worldwide in a wide range of efforts to influence and control information, narratives, media, government policies, and public and expert opinion about China. The CCP’s united front (统战), party-to-party (党际关系), and external propaganda (对外宣传) work is taken right out of the Soviet playbook and is extremely well resourced. These activities go well beyond accruing “soft power”—and involve deliberate state-controlled efforts to affect international opinions about, relations with, and policies toward China. Inside the United States, responsibility for monitoring and countering these efforts largely falls to the FBI and Department of Justice (under the Foreign Agent Registration Act), but the Federal Communications Commission, Department of Education, and even local law enforcement should shoulder their appropriate roles. Abroad, this is largely the responsibility of the Department of State and CIA to monitor and counter.

7. At home in the United States, **we should remain open to China and *not overreact* and see threats where they do not truly exist—but, at the same time, we should *increase vigilance* and *educate our society* about the very real threats that China does present to our democracy, our freedoms and norms, and our security.** As FBI Director Christopher Wray has rightly warned, we need a “whole of society” approach to combatting China’s pernicious espionage, intellectual property theft, and illicit influence activities.³⁶ Many institutions—notably universities—are naive and uneducated about these dangers, and they require education about them (the effort is underway). It is not only a matter of Chinese stealing intellectual property from labs, but also China’s state efforts to export censorship abroad.

At the same time that we need to heighten vigilance, we must be ruthlessly empirical in approaching these issues and not unnecessarily target ethnic Chinese. We must take particular care to protect our Chinese-American communities—as well as innocent Chinese from the PRC—from inuendo, racial profiling, or intimidation/censorship tactics by the Chinese state. The United States has an unfortunate and disgraceful history in this regard—dating back to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, but also including the McCarthy “red scare” in the 1950s, and other mistaken cases such as Wen Ho Lee in 1999. We do not need to repeat this stained legacy.

8. **Call China out publicly on its malign domestic and international behavior.** *Transparency* is a key tool to combat China’s malign influence at home and abroad (“the best disinfectant is sunlight”). In this context, a *spotlight* should be shone on Chinese activities—whether it is “debt trap diplomacy” on Belt and Road projects, Beijing’s political and economic squeezing of Hong Kong, increased pressures on Taiwan, economic support for Iran, ethnic and religious repression in Xinjiang and Tibet, other restrictions of human rights, the surreptitious ownership of American media, exporting censorship, co-opting foreign politicians, manipulating Chinese diaspora communities, or other malign activities.

The best way to do this, though, is generally not via the U.S. government—but through independent investigative reporting and media coverage, investigations by NGOs, and normal governance and oversight in institutions (such as universities). On occasion, however, speeches by senior U.S. officials can also be an effective tool (e.g., Secretary of State Tillerson’s and Pompeo’s criticisms in Latin America and Africa of China’s Belt and Road defects), as is the annual State Department report on human rights in China³⁷ or the Defense Department’s annual report on China’s military.³⁸ The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act also mandated a similar annual report on Chinese influence activities (although the first has yet to appear).

9. **In the realm of technological competition with China, we need to also heighten vigilance and invest in cutting-edge research.** Chinese cyber hacking, espionage, and intellectual property theft have reached epidemic proportions. We need to strengthen our defenses in many ways—including increasing awareness among universities of the threats. Export controls should also be strengthened vis-à-vis China (including via third countries).

Decoupling of the U.S. and Chinese economies is neither desirable nor feasible, but in the areas of advanced technology and protecting U.S. comparative advantages as well as national security, *some* decoupling from China is advisable. It just makes prudent sense. We also need to invest considerable sums into basic research in order to maintain any and all U.S. comparative advantages, as China has achieved “peer competitor” status in the tech domain.

10. **Do not overestimate China.** It is a big and increasingly strong country, but it is also filled with systemic and multiple weaknesses: its population size, aging population, and gender imbalance; rigid single party-state political system; state-dominated fiscal system and non-convertible currency; rigid educational system; high income inequality (.47 Gini coefficient); repression of civil society, dissent, and religion; draconian

controls over Tibet and Xinjiang; controlled media; high level of corruption and kleptocracy; capital out-flight; industrial overcapacity; ballooned corporate and local government debt (nearing 300 percent of GDP); slowing growth; the middle income trap; housing market bubbles and overbuilding (ghost cities); environmental degradation; and a dictatorial leader with no succession plan. In the competition with the United States, these are all Achilles heels for China. China is not a ten-foot-tall giant—we should not overestimate it, and we should be cognizant of its multiple weaknesses.

Avoid a “Dumb” Competition Strategy

If these elements are guides to a “smart competition” strategy, what might be considered elements of a “dumb” competition strategy?

1. Thinking of the competition as a zero-sum contest of finite battles. This is a protracted and long-term contest, with considerable fluidity across multiple functional and geographic domains (like an indefinite soccer match).
2. Developing a comprehensive competition strategy and then under-funding and under-resourcing it. This will require sustained resource allocations over decades—similar to the Cold War against the Soviet Union—which, in turn, requires sustained bipartisan consensus.
3. Failure to see this as a *comprehensive competition* and thus overemphasizing one or two dimensions to the exclusion of others (e.g., military or trade).
4. Forcing others to “choose” the U.S. over China in the contest. This is a certain way to drive other countries into the Chinese camp. Conversely, neglect of and inattention to other countries can have the same result and be equally counterproductive. This is a constant rivalry that requires constant attention.
5. “Scare mongering” or racially profiling ethnic Chinese-Americans, tarnishing the reputations of China specialists, and going on witch hunts for nefarious Chinese activities where they likely do not exist.
6. Closing our doors to Chinese students, investment, and exchanges. The openness of the United States is one of—if not *the*—major asset we have in the competition with China. Our doors to China must remain open, even while we more vigilantly monitor who passes through them.

In devising and implementing a comprehensive competition strategy against China, we must be careful not to fall into these “dumb” traps.

Proceeding Prudently and Democratically

Competing effectively with China over the long term will require a fuller national conversation and forging a new national consensus. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the conversation is well underway in recent years—and it has been very healthy for the American body politic.

Various NGOs can assist in this process. Among them, this includes the National Committee on United States-China Relations (based in New York), a national organization that has drifted from its original mission of public education to one of pro-China engagement. Many other foreign policy organizations can also play a very useful role—such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Committees on Foreign Relations, the American Foreign Policy Council, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the World Affairs Council, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and similar bodies. Washington-based think tanks also have an important national role to play, as do our universities—not only in the classroom, but through convening on-campus programs.

Congress also has a very important role to play by holding numerous and open hearings on China and U.S. relations with China. Recall—and replicate—the 1966 Fulbright hearings on China. Executive branch officials, beginning with the president, also have important roles to play in the national conversation.

Through all of these mechanisms, a full and appropriate national discussion concerning American relations with China can blossom democratically. It must be conducted with respect and based on facts—not caricatures, innuendo, and empirical falsehoods.

China is *the challenge* of our time—and the United States must get to grips with the totality of the competitive challenge in all its dimensions. The U.S. may need a “Sputnik moment” on China to fully focus attention. Following a thorough national discussion and debate, consensus can hopefully be more fully forged (there already exists considerable agreement), and then the federal government (in partnership with state governments and the private sector) can work out a systematic *national strategy*, resources can then be allocated to a variety of programs, and our country can get on with competing fully and effectively with China.

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- ¹ For summaries of the evolving debate, see Gilbert Rozman, “The Debate on China Policy Heats Up: Doves, Hawks, Superhawks, and the Viability of the Think Tank Middle Ground,” *The Asan Forum*, July 16, 2019, <http://www.theasanforum.org/the-debate-over-us-policy-toward-china-heats-up-doves-hawks-superhawks-and-the-viability-of-the-think-tank-middle-ground/>.
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- ¹⁵ This said, there *are* some areas of technology and national security where decoupling is advisable.
- ¹⁶ Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, “Competition without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2019): 109.
- ¹⁷ Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, “Competition without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2019).

- ¹⁸ See, for example, Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Knopf, 2018); Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Vintage, 2008); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2014); Graham Allison, *Destined for War? Can America & China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2017).
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Susan A. Thornton, "Is American Diplomacy with China Dead?" *Foreign Service Journal* (July/August 2019), <https://www.afsa.org/american-diplomacy-china-dead>.
- ²⁰ In this regard see Christopher Ashley Ford, "Re-learning a Competitive Mindset in Great Power Competition" (speech, Washington, DC, March 14, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/re-learning-a-competitive-mindset-in-great-power-competition/>.
- ²¹ On the latter tendency, see, for example, Paul D. Gewirtz, "Can the US-China Crisis Be Stabilized?" The Brookings Institution, June 26, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/06/26/can-the-u-s-china-crisis-be-stabilized/>.
- ²² The Trump administration is definitely pushing back against China across multiple domains and bureaucracies, but it is unclear if there is either a thought-through underlying strategy or if there is centralized coordination from the National Security Council. As distinguished retired diplomat Susan Thornton has noted, this [allegedly] uncoordinated approach has resulted in "open season" where every U.S. bureaucracy thinks it has a "hunting license" to go after China in their policy domain. See Susan Thornton, "Is American Diplomacy with China Dead?" *The Foreign Service Journal* (July/August 2019), <https://www.afsa.org/american-diplomacy-china-dead>.
- ²³ It would be a useful exercise for a think tank or university to receive a grant for such a research project, bringing together former Cold War practitioners and scholars, to scrutinize the record for appropriate tools, experiences, and lessons from the Cold War that may be applicable to China.
- ²⁴ See Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Competition During the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
- ²⁵ Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2019): 98.
- ²⁶ See David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and David Shambaugh, *China & the World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- ²⁷ I have been shocked to learn, when visiting U.S. embassies in Southeast Asia and Latin America over the past two years, that most do not have embassy officers dedicated to tracking China's activities. This has begun to change over the past year, I gather, as the Trump administration is now mandating such data collection and reporting.
- ²⁸ Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2019): 110.
- ²⁹ Edited Transcript of Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's Remarks on "Seeking Opportunities Amidst Disruption - A View from Singapore," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May, 15 2019, https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2019/05/20190516_FMV-Washington---CSIS-Speech.
- ³⁰ China does have a good track record in Africa in the areas of public health, tertiary education, infrastructure, and agriculture.
- ³¹ See Joseph Nye, "China Will Not Surpass America Anytime Soon," *Financial Times*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/7f700ab4-306d-11e9-80d2-7b637a9e1ba1>.
- ³² See Richard Haass, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).
- ³³ See the excellent recent book by Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019).
- ³⁴ As part of its major global external propaganda efforts, the CCP and PRC also feed Xinhua and other state reports into local media in many countries, and PRC sources now dominate Chinese diaspora media worldwide. See Sarah Cook, *The Implications for Democracy of China's Globalizing Media Influence*, Freedom House, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-media/freedom-media-2019#china-essay>; Sarah Cook, "The Long Shadow of Chinese Censorship: How the Communist Party's Media Restrictions Affect News Outlets Around the World," Center for International Media Assistance, October 22, 2013, http://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CIMA-China_Sarah%20Cook.pdf; Emily Feng, "China and the World: How Beijing Spreads the Message," *Financial Times*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/f5d00a86-3296-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498>; Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>; David Shambaugh, "China's Soft Power Push—The Search for Respect," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2015); Daniel Wagner, "China Is Waging a Silent Media War for Global Influence," *The National Interest*, September 19, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-waging-silent-media-war-global-influence-81906>.
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³⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019,” May 2, 2019, https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf.