

Strategic Maneuvering and Peaceful Coexistence: A New Era for U.S.-China Ties?

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Abstract

This essay examines the recent San Francisco meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping, dissecting its implications for the intricate U.S.-China relationship. Amidst a global landscape marked by competition and mistrust, the brief delves into the potential for circumventing conflict and fostering a state of peaceful coexistence. It scrutinizes the strategic shift in rhetoric and underlying policies of both nations, emphasizing the role of non-military strategic maneuvering in achieving national objectives. The document provides a nuanced analysis of the challenges and opportunities for cooperation, offering recommendations for building mutual trust and managing differences constructively. The brief identifies the burgeoning rivalry between the United States and China, which threatens to escalate into increased military posturing, economic coercion, and political maneuvering. It explores the nature of their competition, their strategic approaches, and the imperative of managing this rivalry responsibly. The significance of the Biden-Xi meeting is underscored as a platform for outlining a cooperative approach to international relations, highlighting the need for common ground and peaceful dispute resolution. Characterized by competition, the U.S.-China relationship has experienced a decline in cooperation, with stark differences in trade policies, human rights, and defense strategies. The leadership meeting is portrayed as a crucial step in reaffirming commitments to peace and stability and in charting a course for managing competition. Despite the challenges in sensitive areas such as human rights and technology security, both leaders have articulated a vision that eschews hegemonic ambitions in favor of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation. Drawing parallels with Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China, the brief contrasts the contemporary engagement's complexity and the heightened stakes due to the countries' economic and military might. The Biden-Xi meeting signals a strategic change in dialogue, raising questions about the potential for this shift to manifest in tangible policy improvements. The leaders' strategies and tactics have been analyzed for their emphasis on cooperation while maintaining a robust power stance. The brief concludes by highlighting the critical role of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy in re-establishing diplomatic norms and preventing a catastrophic confrontation. It calls for a strategic engagement that balances power dynamics and averts conflict, advocating for a nuanced approach to one of the most consequential bilateral relationships of the 21st century.

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Executive Summary

The rise of China has been one of the most important international relations phenomena in the past 20 years and raised serious concerns about the future of the international system. Initially, optimistic liberal scholars argued that China would be ‘welcomed into the existing order and prosper within it’ (Glaser, 2011, p.81). While realist scholars predicted increased competition, increasing assertiveness against the United States and a corresponding response by the United States and its allies to balance against it (Glaser, 2011, p.81).

In November 2023, [President Biden and President Xi met in San Francisco](#) to discuss the future of the U.S.-China relationship. The meeting was a [positive step forward in the United States – China relationship](#), but many challenges remain.

This meeting was politically significant because it was the first face to face meeting which has signaled a thawing of frosty relations between the two leaders of the Great Powers since Trump assumed the presidency in January 2017 and unleashed his [anti-China rhetoric](#).

The meeting was significant for the global economy because easing trade tensions between China and the US should boost global growth through [increasing levels of confidence](#), improvement in global supply chains, lower tariffs and reduce trade barriers.

From an international relations perspective, the meeting was important because of their [joint efforts to improve the bilateral dialogue](#) and to re-open critical channels of communications for security purposes and prevent an escalation of regional conflict in the Indo-Pacific, as well as commitments to ongoing dialogues on [climate change](#) and [nuclear non-proliferation](#).

In summary, our key findings of our analysis are as follows:

1. **Conflict is not inevitable.** Unlike Mearsheimer and the offensive realists who predict that conflict is inevitable between the Great Powers of China and the US, I believe, in the immediate future, that the costs of war are too great for either power to shoulder, because the benefits simply do not outweigh the huge costs.
2. **Shifting dynamics:** The US and China remain in a strategically competitive relationship, but both leaders emphasize responsible management to avoid conflict. This differs significantly from the Cold War paradigm.
3. **Strategic approaches:** Leaders employed several tactics, including high-level engagement, open dialogue, competition management, cooperation on shared interests, and continued engagement.
4. **Mixed messages:** While expressing commitment to avoiding conflict, both leaders also downplayed their respective hegemonic ambitions, leading to potential misdirection and deception.
5. **Possible "win-win" scenarios:** Cooperation in areas like drug trafficking, military communication, and AI risk management can benefit both countries without resorting to conflict.

This essay presents our analysis of the San Francisco meeting between President Biden and President Xi, our findings, and recommendations. The central question this brief considers is whether conflict is inevitable, or it is possible for China and the United States to both win without fighting?

To address this question, this essay analyses the meeting between President Biden and President Xi to explore if there is a way for China and the United States to first, avoid conflict and achieve their own goals; and second, to find ways to coexist peacefully and prosperously, and whether there exists the potential for a more cooperative relationship between China and the United States.

However, the analysis reveals that the change in the rhetoric between President Biden and President Xi did not translate into a change in policy. For example, President Xi reiterated [previous claims that China is not seeking to expand its territory](#). This statement is a form of misdirection by Xi, since [China has a long history of territorial expansion](#), and it continues to make claims on the territory of other countries. In the same vein, President Biden claimed that he would not seek to change China's system. This statement is somewhat deceptive, since Biden, even though he has made numerous statements to the contrary, knows that the [United States will continue to try to change China's system](#), but it seems he wanted to avoid making this explicit so as not to [provoke China](#).

The failure to translate rhetoric into a change in policy brings risks, including the potential erosion of trust and credibility when a change in rhetoric is not followed by a change in policy. It can make it more difficult for leaders to cooperate and achieve their goals.

However, a change in rhetoric can create space for diplomacy and dialogue, even if the underlying policies have not changed. It can also signal a willingness to compromise and find common ground. This can be important for resolving disputes and reaching agreements. For example, the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication, can overcome misunderstandings and miscalculations, and avoid disastrous consequences.

Background

A “State of Crisis”, a “New Cold War”, or a “Thucydides Trap”?

Many commentators conclude that the US-China relationship to be in a “[state of crisis](#)”, locked in a new “[Cold War](#)”, a “[Thucydides Trap](#)” (a situation in which a rising power inevitably challenges a dominant power, leading to conflict), an [era of Great Power Competition](#), engaged in a “[dangerous game of brinkmanship](#)”, and on a “[collision course](#)” where conflict will be inevitable.

Over the past decade much has been written about the meteoric rise of China and its increasingly aggressive and assertive posturing, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Deep concerns have been raised about the inevitability of conflict between China and the United States, and the undeniable disastrous consequences of conflict. Equal attention has been attributed to the [United States policy of containing China](#), notwithstanding hollow protestations by the Trump administration that the US does “[not seek to contain China’s development, nor do we wish to disengage from the Chinese people](#)” and [Biden’s attempt to argue the US was not trying to contain China](#) when most of the evidence suggests otherwise.

Is this still the situation after the San Francisco meeting between President Biden and President Xi? I think not because both President Biden and Xi seemed, at least on the outside, to have sheathed their swords for the meantime, downplaying their hegemonic ambitions.

A complex and consequential relationship

The relationship between the United States and China is one of the most complex and consequential in the world. The two countries represent the world's two largest economies and militaries, and they have a long history of both cooperation and competition. In recent years, the relationship has been strained by trade disputes, human rights concerns, and disagreements over Taiwan.

The United States containment of China has characterized the relationship for over a decade, starting with the [Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"](#). Announced in 2011, the "pivot to Asia" was a foreign policy strategy that aimed to rebalance U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy was based on the belief that the Asia-Pacific region was the world's most dynamic and consequential region in the 21st century. This shift in focus was driven by factors including the rise of China as a global power, the growing economic importance of the region, and the need to maintain American leadership in the Pacific.

The United States policy of containment of China was intensified under the Trump administration, characterized as a period of intensifying rivalry and competition, marked by a growing sense of mistrust and a decline in cooperation. Since 2017 the relationship has been labeled to be in a "state of crisis", locked in a new "Cold War", a "Thucydides Trap" (a situation in which a rising power inevitably challenges a dominant power, leading to conflict), an era of Great Power Competition, engaged in a "dangerous game of brinkmanship", and on a "collision course" where conflict will be inevitable.

In contrast the White House has declared that "[The Biden administration is not seeking to change or contain China, but rather its policy is for the two major powers to coexist in the international system.](#)"

The factors that make the US-China relationship not only complex but also consequential, (as their interactions can have far-reaching impacts on global economic stability, security, and governance) are set out in the following table.

<i>Economic Interdependence</i>	The U.S. and China are the world's two largest economies. They are deeply intertwined through trade and investment, making their economic relationship vital for global economic stability.
<i>Global Influence</i>	Both nations wield significant influence on the global stage. Their policies and actions can shape international norms, institutions, and outcomes in areas ranging from climate change to global health to technology standards.
<i>Military Power</i>	The U.S. and China are among the world's most powerful military nations. Their strategic decisions can impact regional and global security dynamics.
<i>Ideological Differences</i>	The U.S. and China have different political systems and ideologies, leading to differing views on governance, human rights, and the role of the state in society and the economy.
<i>Competition and Cooperation</i>	The U.S. and China are both competitors and partners. They compete for influence and resources, but also need to cooperate

	on shared challenges like climate change, nuclear proliferation, and pandemics.
<i>Regional Dynamics</i>	The U.S. and China are involved in complex regional dynamics, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Issues like the South China Sea disputes, the status of Taiwan, and relations with North Korea add complexity to the relationship.

Table 1 Factors that make the U.S.-China relationship not only complex but also consequential.

Many of these factors are interrelated. For example, the global influence of the US and China is largely driven by their [economic interdependence](#). As the world's two largest economies, their economic decisions can significantly impact not just each other but also the global economy. This interdependence also influences their global standing and their ability to shape international norms and standards.

The competing interests between the US and China often stem from their differing political systems and [strategic rivalry](#). For instance, their contrasting views on governance and human rights often lead to disagreements and tensions. These competing interests and ideological differences add to the complexity of their relationship.

The military power of the US and China is closely tied to their [technological capabilities](#). Their competition for technological dominance, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and 5G, has implications for their military capabilities and national security. This competition can potentially escalate tensions and increase the risk of conflict.

The [global influence of the US and China](#) is also tied to their military power. As two of the world's most powerful militaries, their actions can significantly impact global security and stability. Their [military capabilities](#) also influence their standing in the international system and their ability to shape global norms and standards.

The economic interdependence between the US and China extends to the realm of [technology](#). Their competition in areas like artificial intelligence and 5G not only has implications for their national security but also their economic prosperity. This competition can influence their economic relations and add another layer of complexity to their relationship.

The need to avoid conflict.

Before continuing further, it's worthwhile highlighting the reasons to avoid conflict between Great Powers and to consider the alternative scenarios likely to develop if the spiral downwards is not corrected.

First, conflicts between Great Powers involves advanced weaponry, leading to immense loss of life, property damage, and environmental degradation. The consequences of such conflicts can be devastating and long-lasting, affecting generations to come.

Second, avoiding conflicts helps maintain stability and predictability in the global economy, fostering economic prosperity for all nations because Great Powers play a pivotal role in the global economy, and their conflicts have a severe impact on international trade, financial markets, and economic growth.

Third, preventing conflicts between Great Powers can promote regional security and reduce the risk of global instability. Conflicts between Great Powers can destabilize entire regions and trigger wider conflicts.

China-US Relations Post San Fransisco

The November meeting in San Fransisco is a new landmark in China-US relations, signaling to the international system a reversal in the downward spiraling relationship in which the likelihood of conflict was increasing every day.

While there exists ongoing Great Power competition between China and the United States, the existential threat of conflict has been mitigated by factors including the emphasis by both leaders of the priority for peace and stability, the responsible management of competition, continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation.

President Biden and President Xi both recognized the dangers of conflict and confrontation expressed a commitment to managing the competition between the United States and China responsibly with the unequivocal objectives of preventing it from spiraling into conflict.

A New Era of Strategic Maneuvering

In November 2023, in San Francisco, the US-China relationship entered a new era characterized by *strategic maneuvering*, the primary objective of which is to achieve one's goals without resorting to the use of military force. It is an approach that emphasizes certain aspects of their arguments while downplaying others to achieve one's goals.

The concerted Indo-Pacific strategies pursued by the United States and its allies compelled China to re-engage in diplomatic efforts and averted what many were predicting would lead to a direct confrontation between the Great Powers.

This aggressive behavior, according to Mearsheimer, is not driven by malice or a desire for domination, but rather by a fundamental need for survival in a competitive and unpredictable world. But his theory fails to account for the role of cooperation and diplomacy in international affairs.

The renowned international relations scholar John Mearsheimer, the originator of the offensive realism school of thought in international relations in his 1981 book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", has been highly vocal in his concerns about the escalating potential for a direct confrontation between China and the United States. Offensive realism is a structural theory that posits that the anarchical nature of the international system compels states to behave as power-maximizing actors, constantly seeking to enhance their own security and power at the expense of potential rivals.

Collectively, these strategies successfully eroded China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific and momentarily hindered its pursuit of regional hegemony. China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific has been further eroded by its domestic economic problems and social unrest, including its slowing economy, and rising unemployment, the depressed housing market, and the domestic concerns raised about the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) highlight the need for greater

transparency, accountability, and public engagement in the planning and implementation of BRI projects.

But notwithstanding China's unexpected reversal in its outward looking appearance, the Janus-faced China has not changed any of its underlying policy or intentions.

It easy to forget that China is an authoritarian state governed by a single party and an autocratic leader fixated with fulfilling the imperialist desires of its founder of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), Mao, in a manner that is not dissimilar to Russia's Putin. The United States has again demonstrated its Great Power status with its recent support for the State of Israel and the war against Hamas.

Is peace a realistic option?

But is this a realistic conclusion given the deep-seated mistrust, structural rivalry, and potential for miscalculation that exist between the two leaders?

John Mearsheimer, a renowned realist scholar in international relations, begins with the assertion that great powers "maximize their relative power" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21), has widely [expressed concerns about the significant potential for conflict between China and the United States](#). Mearsheimer [argues](#) that the rise of China as a major power will inevitably lead to a conflict with the United States, as China seeks hegemon status in the Asia-Pacific region, and more broadly in the global system.

The weakness in Mearsheimer's offensive realism is the 'overemphasis on power and security maximization as motivations of states' behaviour' (Snyder, 2014, p.151). While it is impossible to predict the future with any degree of certainty, Mearsheimer's proclamations do not adequately account for the possibility of cooperation between China and the United States.

Mearsheimer's views seem overly deterministic, even pessimistic, based on a realist theory which over-emphasizes the role of power and competition. Mearsheimer does not give enough weight, if any at all, to non-material factors including cooperation between states, the roles of institutions, and influence of international norms, factors that play a significant role in shaping global dynamics and influencing state behavior.

[Non-material factors are essential for understanding and shaping global dynamics](#). While military power remains crucial, shaping the international order through non-military means, such as information and economic statecraft, is equally important for the United States to maintain its competitive edge as global hegemon.

Cooperation, institutions, and norms provide the scaffolding for a more stable, cooperative, and rules-based international order. The competition with China, is not just about military strength but also about shaping the rules, norms, and institutions governing the international system.

While Mearsheimer acknowledges the existence of non-material factors, such as cooperation, institutions, and norms, he downplays their significance compared to material factors. Moreover, Mearsheimer's offensive realism, from a statecraft perspective, adds little to the discourse on *how to avoid conflict* in the short to medium term because Mearsheimer's realist theory deems conflict as *inevitable* (Friedberg, 2005, Glaser, 2011).

The Alternatives to Cooperation

The alternative to a commitment to managing the competition between the United States and China responsibly and preventing it from spiraling into conflict is a scenario of increased tensions, heightened risks of miscalculation, and a potential escalation into conflict. Such a conflict would be devastating, with potentially catastrophic consequences for both countries and the world.

In this scenario, the rivalry between the United States and China could intensify, leading to increased military posturing, economic coercion, and political maneuvering. This could raise the stakes and make it more difficult for the two countries to find common ground and resolve disputes peacefully.

The Significance of the Biden and Xi San Fransisco Meeting

The meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping was [significant for the Indo-Pacific region](#) in several dimensions that should lead to better managing the bilateral relations between China and the United States, increase their mutual understanding, improve global stability and security, and higher levels of cooperation in areas of mutual interest including climate change, and high-level military-to-military communication.¹

First, it marked a high-level engagement between the world's two largest economies and military powers, which is crucial for managing bilateral relations and addressing global challenges.

Second, the leaders held candid and constructive discussions on a range of bilateral and global issues, including areas of potential cooperation and differences. This open dialogue is important for building mutual understanding and managing disagreements.

Third, President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. This approach to managing U.S.-China competition is significant as it has implications for global stability and security.

Fourth, the two leaders made progress on several key issues, including the resumption of bilateral cooperation to combat global illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking, the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication, and the need to address the risks of advanced AI systems. These agreements indicate a commitment to cooperation in areas of shared interest.

Finally, the two leaders underscored the importance of working together to accelerate efforts to tackle the climate crisis in this critical decade. They welcomed recent positive discussions between their respective special envoys for climate, including on national actions to reduce

¹ The two leaders exchanged views on key regional and global challenges. President Biden underscored the United States' support for a free and open Indo-Pacific that is connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. The President reaffirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to defending our Indo-Pacific allies. See: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/15/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/#:~:text=The%20two%20leaders%20exchanged%20views,defending%20our%20Indo%2DPacific%20allies> .

emissions in the 2020s, on common approaches toward a successful COP 28, and on operationalizing the Working Group on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s to accelerate concrete climate actions. President Biden stated that the United States stands ready to work together with China to address transnational challenges, such as health security and debt and climate finance in developing countries and emerging markets.

The leaders agreed to follow up on their discussions with continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, including visits in both directions and ongoing working-level consultations in key areas. This commitment to continued engagement is significant as it can help to manage tensions, build trust, and explore potential areas of cooperation.

In conclusion, the meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping was significant due to the high-level engagement, open dialogue, approach to managing competition, progress on key issues, and commitment to continued engagement.

An Era of Strategic Maneuvering

China and the United States have entered a new era characterized by *strategic maneuvering* (Eemeren, 2010), the primary objective of which is to achieve one's goals without resorting to the use of military force.² At the same time, [President Biden](#) and [President Xi](#) signaled to each other, unequivocally, a clear understanding of the other's interests and strengths, both maintaining a strong position of power throughout the meeting.

The high-level discourse between President Biden and President Xi reveals *strategic maneuvering* will entail restoring diplomatic norms, responsibly managing competition, the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication, engaging in bilateral cooperation to combat global illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking, the need to address the risks of advanced AI systems and to work together to accelerate efforts to tackle the climate crisis in this critical decade.

The art of strategic maneuvering in international relations is a complex and demanding endeavor, requiring a deep understanding of global dynamics, diplomatic skills, and the ability to adapt and respond to ever-changing circumstances. It is through this intricate web of strategy and diplomacy that China and the United States are now navigating the complex landscape of international relations, pursuing their interests while seeking to maintain peace and stability in a world of diverse perspectives and competing ambitions.

In the realm of international relations, the art of strategic maneuvering entails deftly navigating the intricate landscape of global politics to achieve one's objectives. It involves a blend of calculated actions, astute diplomacy, and the ability to anticipate and respond to the moves of other actors.

Effective strategic maneuvering requires a deep understanding of the dynamics at play, the interests and motivations of various players, and the potential consequences of one's actions. It

² VAN EEMEREN, F. H., VAN EEMEREN, F. H. & HOUTLOSSER, P. 2015. Strategic maneuvering: Maintaining a delicate balance. *Reasonableness and effectiveness in argumentative discourse: Fifty contributions to the development of pragma-dialectics*, 349-379.

demands a combination of strategic thinking, tactical agility, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

“Winning without fighting” is the goal of strategic maneuvering. When a country can achieve its objectives without resorting to force, it has not only avoided the costs and risks of conflict, but it has also demonstrated its ability to outmaneuver its rivals. Importantly, both countries can avoid the costs and risks of conflict and create a more stable and prosperous world when they engage in strategic maneuvering by cooperating and finding common ground.

Historically, authoritarian states have engaged in behavior that undermines peace, stability, and cooperation in the international arena. China is no exception. While China has made significant economic strides in recent decades, its political system and foreign policy are widely perceived as undermining peace, stability, and cooperation through its military expansion and assertiveness in the South China Sea; its violation of international law and international norms; its close relationships with and support for authoritarian regimes including Russia, North Korea, Iran, and Sudan enabling human rights abuses and undermining democracy, its Belt and Road Initiative and debt-trap diplomacy and its human rights abuses.

In the Indo-Pacific region, China's coercive behaviors have raised concerns among its neighbors including its growing military presence and its assertive territorial claims. All leading to increased tensions and a heightened risk of conflict.

Key findings

1. President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. He reiterated that the world expects the United States and China to manage competition responsibly.

This suggests that while there are significant tensions and competition between the two countries, *it is not accurate to characterize the current state of United States - China relations as a new Cold War.*

2. Several key approaches of the leaders can be inferred from the content of their discussions:
 - a. *High-Level Engagement:* Both leaders engaged in a high-level summit, which is a strategic approach to managing bilateral relations and addressing global challenges.
 - b. *Open Dialogue:* The two leaders held a candid and constructive discussion on a range of bilateral and global issues, including areas of potential cooperation and differences. This suggests a tactic of open dialogue to build mutual understanding and manage disagreements.
 - c. *Emphasis on Competition Management:* President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. This strategic approach to managing U.S.-China competition is significant as it has implications for global stability and security.

- d. *Cooperation on Shared Interests:* The two leaders made progress on several key issues, including the resumption of bilateral cooperation to combat global illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking, the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication, and the need to address the risks of advanced AI systems. These agreements indicate a tactic of cooperation in areas of shared interest.
- e. *Continued Engagement:* The leaders agreed to follow up on their discussions with continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, including visits in both directions and ongoing working-level consultations in key areas. This commitment to continued engagement is a strategic approach to managing bilateral relations.

In conclusion, the strategies and tactics employed by each leader in their meeting included high-level engagement, open dialogue, emphasis on competition management, cooperation on shared interests, and continued engagement.

- 3. In some respects, both Xi and Biden tactfully set out to acquire a strategic advantage over the other camouflaging their real intentions to create confusion or complacency in the other.
 - a. For example, Xi claimed that China is not seeking to expand its territory. This statement is a form of misdirection by Xi, since China has a long history of territorial expansion, and it continues to make claims on the territory of other countries.
 - b. Moreover, Xi has not explicitly stated his support for a "free and open Indo-Pacific".
 - c. Furthermore, Xi claimed that China is not interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. This statement is a form of deception because China has a history of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and it continues to do so today.
- 4. In other respects, both leaders expressed a commitment to managing the competition between the United States and China responsibly and preventing it from spiraling into conflict.
 - a. Both emphasized the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation.
 - b. They both recognized the dangers of conflict and confrontation. This suggests that there is a growing consensus between the two leaders on the need to manage the US-China relationship in a constructive and cooperative manner.
 - c. While both Xi and Biden made it clear they wish to avoid confrontation and conflict they simultaneously downplayed their countries' hegemonic ambitions and intentions and want to be perceived as peaceful and responsible powers.
 - d. Biden set out to downplay the seriousness of the rivalry between the United States and China, while Xi endeavored to project an image of China as a peaceful and responsible power.

- e. Xi claimed that China is committed to free trade and open markets. This statement is another form of deception. China's economy is still heavily controlled by the government, and it is not truly open to foreign competition.
 - f. Xi claimed that China is a peaceful and responsible power. This statement is widely interpreted to downplay China's growing military power and its ambitions to become a global leader.
 - g. Biden's goal was to avoid conflict with China and to buy time to prepare for the possibility of conflict, while Xi's goal was to maintain China's rise to power without provoking the United States.
 - h. They both showed a clear understanding of the other's interests and strengths, and they maintained a strong position of power throughout the meeting.
5. It is possible for both China and the United States to "win" without fighting. This concept is often referred to as "win-win cooperation," and it involves finding areas of mutual interest where both countries can benefit from cooperation. For example:
- a. The two leaders made progress on several key issues, including the resumption of bilateral cooperation to combat global illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking, the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication, and the need to address the risks of advanced AI systems.
 - b. These agreements indicate a commitment to cooperation in areas of shared interest, which can benefit both countries.
 - c. Furthermore, President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. This approach to managing competition can allow both countries to pursue their interests without resorting to conflict.

In conclusion, while there are significant challenges in the United States-China relationship, it is possible for both countries to "win" without fighting through strategies such as win-win cooperation and responsible management of competition.

Key Issues

Affirmation of commitments to the Indo-Pacific

President Biden underscored the United States' support for a free and open Indo-Pacific that is connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. He also reaffirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to defending its Indo-Pacific allies. This reaffirmation of commitments is significant as it sends a clear message to the region about the United States' continued engagement and commitment to its allies and partners.

President Xi emphasized the importance peace and stability and cooperation in the region; however, China has its own views on regional security and cooperation.

Peace and stability.

President Biden emphasized the United States' enduring commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight, adherence to international law, maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea and East China Sea, and the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This emphasis on peace and stability is significant as it addresses key concerns in the region, particularly in relation to territorial disputes and nuclear threats.

President Xi noted that China and the United States have two options in the era of global transformations: one is to enhance solidarity and cooperation to meet global challenges and promote global security and prosperity, and the other is to provoke rivalry and confrontation, which would drive the world toward turmoil and division. He stated that turning their back on each other is not an option and that conflict and confrontation have unbearable consequences for both sides.

Managing US-China competition

President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. This approach to managing U.S.-China competition is significant as it has implications for the balance of power and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Continued high-level diplomacy and interactions:

The two leaders agreed to follow up on their discussions with continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, including visits in both directions and ongoing working-level consultations in key areas. This commitment to continued engagement is significant as it can help to manage tensions, build trust, and explore potential areas of cooperation, which can contribute to stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

In conclusion, the meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping is significant for the Indo-Pacific region as it reaffirms the United States' commitments, emphasizes the importance of peace and stability, outlines an approach to managing U.S.-China competition, and commits to continued high-level diplomacy and interactions.

Could this be a déjà vu moment: Nixon 1972?

Has the relationship US-China relationship undergone a transformation of the magnitude like that resulting from President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China?

Can we deduce that the leaders, President Biden, and President Xi realized that the existential threat of spiraling into conflict will lead to disastrous outcomes adversely affecting both China and the United States, and some form of cooperation, at least in the *short to medium term* is a mutually beneficial proposition, and foreign policy strategy?

I think the answer to both questions is in the affirmative and that domestic considerations have also played a role in influencing each leader.

Nixon's 1972 visit to China was a significant step towards managing the competition between the United States and China and preventing it from spiraling into conflict. The visit, known as the "Nixon Shock," was a major diplomatic breakthrough that helped to thaw the Cold War-era tensions between the two countries.

Prior to the visit, the United States and China had been locked in a bitter rivalry for decades. The two countries had no formal diplomatic relations, and they often engaged in hostile rhetoric and military posturing. However, Nixon believed that the United States and China had common interests that could be advanced through cooperation, such as countering the Soviet Union's growing power.

In 1971, Nixon secretly sent his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, to China to meet with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. The two sides agreed to normalize relations and to arrange a meeting between Nixon and Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Communist Party of China.

Nixon's visit to China in February 1972 was a watershed moment in U.S.-China relations. The two sides signed a joint communiqué, known as the Shanghai Communiqué, in which they acknowledged their differences but also pledged to work together on issues of common interest. The visit helped to reduce tensions between the two countries and opened new avenues for cooperation.

Nixon's engagement with China was a bold and risky move, but it ultimately helped to improve relations between the two countries and to reduce the risk of conflict. The visit set the stage for decades of cooperation between the United States and China, and it remains a landmark event in U.S.-China relations.

A positive meeting - but challenges remain.

The table below summarizes challenges that remain in the relationship between the United States and China.

<i>Human Rights</i>	President Biden raised concerns regarding PRC human rights abuses, including in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. These issues remain a significant challenge in the relationship.
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<i>Trade and Economic Practices</i>	President Biden also raised continued concerns about the PRC’s unfair trade policies, non-market economic practices, and punitive actions against U.S. firms, which harm American workers and families. Resolving these economic and trade disputes is a major challenge.
<i>Technology and National Security</i>	The President emphasized that the United States would continue to take necessary actions to prevent advanced U.S. technologies from being used to undermine U.S. national security, without unduly limiting trade and investment. Balancing the need for economic cooperation with national security concerns is a complex challenge.
<i>Climate Crisis</i>	The two leaders underscored the importance of working together to accelerate efforts to tackle the climate crisis. However, coordinating effective and ambitious climate action is a major challenge.
<i>Detained American Citizens</i>	The President again emphasized that it remains a priority to resolve the cases of American citizens who are wrongfully detained or subject to exit bans in China. This issue remains a challenge in the bilateral relationship.

Table 2 Challenges that remain in the relationship between the United States and China

Various commentators have characterized the US-China relationship under the Trump administration as a period of intensifying rivalry and competition, marked by a growing sense of mistrust and a decline in cooperations. The relationship has been labeled to be in a “state of crisis”, locked in a new “Cold War”, a "Thucydides Trap" (a situation in which a rising power inevitably challenges a dominant power, leading to conflict), an era of Great Power Competition, engaged in a “dangerous game of brinkmanship”, and on a “collision course” where conflict will be inevitable.

The key findings of this brief are:

1. The complex and challenging relationship between the United States and China can be managed through high-level dialogue, cooperation on common challenges, and constructive management of differences.
 - a. Regular communication between top officials can help to clarify intentions, reduce misunderstandings, and build trust. This can involve summits between the presidents, as well as meetings between other high-ranking officials.
 - b. The United States and China can work together on issues of mutual concern, such as combating drug trafficking, addressing the climate crisis, and tackling regional and global challenges. This cooperation can build goodwill and demonstrate the benefits of a constructive relationship.
 - c. The United States and China have significant differences on a range of issues, including trade policies, human rights, and the defense of allies. These differences need to be managed in a way that prevents them from escalating into conflict. This can involve a combination of negotiation, compromise, and agreeing to disagree on certain issues.

- d. Both countries need to respect each other's core interests and major concerns and strive for peaceful coexistence. This involves recognizing that both countries have a role to play in the international system, and that a confrontational relationship is not in either country's interest.
 - e. Both leaders agreed to continue high-level diplomacy and interactions in key areas. This ongoing engagement can help to maintain lines of communication, manage tensions, and explore potential areas of cooperation.
2. The strategies and tactics employed by each leader in their meeting varied, with Biden being more subtle and indirect, focusing on domestic concerns, while Xi was more direct and focused on international concerns.³
3. The change in rhetoric between President Biden and President Xi does not necessarily signal a change in underlying policy or intentions.⁴ Both leaders downplayed their countries' hegemonic ambitions and intentions and wanted to be perceived as peaceful and responsible powers.
4. The competition between the United States and China can be managed responsibly and prevent it from spiraling into conflict by emphasizing the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation.⁵
5. The strategic maneuvering in the US-China relationship has evolved with both leaders showing a clear understanding of the other's interests and strengths and maintaining a strong position of power throughout their meeting.
6. Domestic economic problems and social unrest in China, including its slowing economy and rising unemployment, have further eroded its dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

³ President Biden emphasized that the United States would continue to take necessary actions to prevent advanced U.S. technologies from being used to undermine national security, without unduly limiting trade and investment. He also raised concerns about the PRC's unfair trade policies, non-market economic practices, and punitive actions against U.S. firms, which harm American workers and families. Furthermore, he stressed that it remains a priority to resolve the cases of American citizens who are wrongfully detained or subject to exit bans in China.

⁴ Rhetoric in diplomatic communications can often serve as a tool for signaling intentions, managing perceptions, or setting the tone for future interactions, without necessarily indicating a substantive change in policy.

For instance, President Biden emphasized that the United States and China are in competition but stressed that this competition must be managed responsibly to prevent it from veering into conflict, confrontation, or a new Cold War. This rhetoric suggests a desire for responsible management of competition and prevention of conflict but does not necessarily indicate a change in the United States' underlying policy towards China.

⁵ To manage this competition responsibly, both nations have resumed high-level military-to-military communication, as well as the U.S.-China Defense Policy Coordination Talks and the U.S.-China Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings. Both sides are also resuming telephone conversations between theater commanders.

Furthermore, the two leaders agreed that their teams will follow up on their discussions with continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, including visits in both directions and ongoing working-level consultations in key areas, including on commercial, economic, financial, Asia-Pacific, arms control, and non-proliferation, maritime, export control enforcement, policy-planning, agriculture, and disability issues.

How is it different 50 years later?

The current engagement between the United States and China shares some similarities with Nixon's 1972 visit but there are also some key differences.

Both events were driven by a desire to manage competition and prevent conflict. Nixon sought to thaw Cold War tensions, while the current engagement aims to manage the rivalry between the United States and China and prevent it from escalating into conflict. Both events involved high-level diplomacy. In 1972, Nixon visited China and met with Mao Zedong, while President Biden has held several virtual summits with Chinese President Xi Jinping prior to their 2023 meeting in San Francisco. Both events were both seeking to foster cooperation and deeper engagement for mutual benefit and to avoid future conflict. But there are also key differences. The current engagement between the United States and China will be more challenging and complex than Nixon's 1972 visit. The two countries will need to find new ways to manage their competition in a way that is both sustainable and peaceful.

Central to a successful outcome will be the establishment of mutual trust between the leaders of the United States and China. Establishing mutual trust will not be easy, but it is essential for managing the competition between the United States and China in a way that is both sustainable and peaceful. If the two countries can find ways to build trust, they will be better equipped to avoid conflict and cooperate on issues that affect the future of the world. Specific ways in which the two countries can establish mutual trust are set out below in policy recommendations.

Fifty years on and the future engagement between the United States and China will be more challenging and complex compared to the Nixon era. The factors influencing the US-China relationship today focus more on economic and military power, the geo-political landscape, heightened economic competition, technology, cybersecurity, and human rights.

The asymmetrical power relationship of the 20th century between the United States and China has been radically transformed due incisively to the explosive growth in the Chinese economy and international trade and the accompanying growth in the size and might of China's military capability.

In the 21st century, the geo-political landscape has altered significantly resulting from the strong alliances the United States establishing in the Indo-Pacific, the strengthening of ASEAN, the advancement of international human rights treaties and conventions including the ICCPR and ICESCR, and the emergence of non-state actors playing an increasingly prominent role in global affairs. Additional factors contribute to a more challenging and complex engagement between the United States and China.

Critically, the nature of the competition between China and the United States is significantly different. In the 1970s, the United States and China were competing within the context of the Cold War, while today's competition is multifaceted and includes economic, technological, and ideological dimensions.

From the 1950's onwards the United States ideological opposition to communism was paramount in its foreign policy objectives. Whereas today, the United States primary concern is to restrain China's hegemonic ambitions first in the Indo-Pacific, and second in the international system, a reality that could not possibly have existed in the 20th century.

Another important dimension to consider is that the stakes are considerably higher now given that the United States and China are now the world's two largest economies and militaries, and their rivalry has a more profound impact on the global order. Any military conflict could have disastrous consequences for the peace and stability of the global system.

A strategic change in rhetoric

The November 2023, San Francisco meeting between President Biden and President Xi signals a highly strategic change in the rhetoric of both sides. But does it signal a change in underlying policy or intentions?

While the change in rhetoric is encouraging, it remains to be seen whether this transition in rhetoric will translate into actions and policies that improve the US-China relationship.

There remains a degree of uncertainty surrounding the implications of the change in rhetoric between President Biden and President Xi. It is important the actions and policies of both countries in the coming months and years are closely monitored to assess whether the change in rhetoric is genuine and enduring.

A change in underlying policy or intentions?

Biden and Xi used different language or tone than they have in the past, which suggests that there may be a shift in their relationship. This change can be viewed as positive sign, as it suggests that the parties are willing to engage with each other and are open to the possibility of finding common ground. It does not necessarily mean that there has been a change in underlying policy or intentions. Biden and Xi may simply be trying to improve their public image or to gain a tactical advantage in negotiations.

The recent meeting between Presidents Biden and Xi exemplified the principles of effective diplomacy, showcasing a departure from the confrontational approach that has characterized US-China relations since 2017. It has taken six years to recalibrate the US-China relationship away from confrontation and heightened potential for a military conflict particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where the struggle for hegemony has been increasingly contested.

Averting disastrous conflict

A key finding of our analysis is that both leaders declared a commitment to managing the competition between the United States and China responsibly and prevent it from spiraling into conflict in the immediate future. Biden and Xi each emphasized the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation. They also both recognized the dangers of conflict and confrontation.

This suggests that there is a growing consensus between the two leaders on the need to manage the US-China relationship in a constructive and cooperative manner. They both showed a clear understanding of the other's interests and strengths, and they maintained a strong position of power throughout the meeting.

Restoring diplomatic norms

The November 2023 San Francisco meeting marks a significant step towards restoring diplomatic norms and averting a potentially disastrous confrontation between the two powers. It also illustrated the points of difference between Xi and Biden.

On the one hand, Xi and Biden recognized that a conflict between the United States and China would have devastating consequences for both countries and the world. Both emphasized the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation.

For example:

1. Both leaders are committed to managing the competition between the United States and China responsibly and preventing it from spiraling into conflict.
2. Both emphasized the importance of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation.
3. They also both recognized the dangers of conflict and confrontation. This suggests that there is a growing consensus between the two leaders on the need to manage the US-China relationship in a constructive and cooperative manner.
4. They both showed a clear understanding of the other's interests and strengths, and they maintained a strong position of power throughout the meeting.

Key differences in strategies and tactics

On the other hand, the contrasting approaches to competition of Xi and Biden demonstrated during the November 2023 meeting underscore the divergent perspectives of the two leaders and their respective countries and how they will manage the complex relationship that has so many dimensions.

The main difference between Biden's and Xi's strategies and tactics was their approach to competition. Biden was more open about the fact that the United States and China are in competition, while Xi was more focused on emphasizing the potential for cooperation. This reflects the different priorities and perspectives of the two leaders and their respective countries.

The main difference between Biden's and Xi's strategies and tactics was their approach to competition. Biden was more open about the fact that the United States and China are in competition, while Xi was more focused on emphasizing the potential for cooperation. However, both leaders acknowledged that the United States and China are the two most powerful countries in the world and that their relationship will have a significant impact on the future of the world.

Another key difference between Biden's and Xi's strategies and tactics was their approach to human rights. Biden raised concerns about China's human rights abuses, while Xi did not address the issue directly. This suggests that human rights will continue to be a major point of contention between the United States and China.

Biden's strategies and tactics

Central is Biden's understanding that a conflict between the United States and China would have devastating consequences for both countries and the world. Biden deftly navigated the intricate landscape of the US-Sino relationship drawing on his deep understanding of the dynamics at play, the interests and motivations of the various actors, and the potential consequences of his words and actions.

Around this core principle, Biden communicated to Xi, and the world, a robust security web combining astute diplomacy and calculated strategies capable of anticipating and responding to the moves of other actors.

1. Biden claimed that he would not seek to change China's system. This statement was another form of deception. Biden knew that the United States would continue to try to change China's system, but he wanted to avoid making this explicit so as not to provoke China.
2. Biden claimed that he would not seek to revitalize its alliances against China. This statement was a form of misdirection. Biden knew that the United States was already revitalizing its alliances against China, but he wanted to avoid making this explicit so as not to give China a *casus belli*.
3. Biden claimed that he does not support "Taiwan independence". This statement was a form of deception. Biden knows that the United States cannot publicly support "Taiwan independence" without risking war with China, but he also knows that the United States cannot abandon Taiwan to its fate. His statement was simply a way of avoiding making an explicit commitment to Taiwan's defense.
4. Biden claimed that he has no intention to have a conflict with China. This statement was a form of misdirection. Biden knows that the United States and China are on a collision course, and he is preparing for the possibility of conflict. His statement was simply a way of downplaying the seriousness of the situation.
5. Biden emphasized the United States' commitment to its allies and partners. This was a way of signaling to Xi that the United States is not afraid to stand up for its interests and that it has a strong network of support around the world.
6. Biden warned against the dangers of conflict. This was a way of deterring Xi from taking any actions that could lead to war.
7. Biden used deception and misdirection to his advantage. He did this by emphasizing the United States' desire to cooperate with China on a range of issues, while also making it clear that the United States would not tolerate China's human rights abuses or its unfair trade practices.
8. Biden maintained a strong position of power. He did this by emphasizing the United States' military and economic strength.

Xi's strategies and tactics

Xi also employed several strategies and tactics in his meeting with Biden that were consistent with emphasizing the potential for cooperation. For example, Xi:

1. Emphasized China's commitment to peaceful development and cooperation. This was a way of signaling to Biden that China is not a threat and that it is interested in working with the United States to solve global problems.
2. Used deception and misdirection to his advantage. He did this by emphasizing China's desire to cooperate with the United States on a range of issues, while also making it clear that China would not allow the United States to interfere in its internal affairs.
3. Maintained a strong position of power. He did this by highlighting China's growing global influence and its economic and military power.

The impact of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy

It is worth noting that the US Indo-Pacific strategy has played a significant role in restoring diplomatic norms and averting a potentially disastrous confrontation between the United States and China. The strategy, which was unveiled in 2017, was designed to "promote a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific region" through a combination of strengthening alliances, promoting economic growth, and enhancing security cooperation.

Steps taken by the US included:

1. Strengthening alliances with key partners in the region, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India. This has included increased military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense cooperation.
2. Promoting economic growth in the region through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) a regional trade agreement that aims to promote economic cooperation and address shared challenges such as climate change and digital trade.
3. Enhancing security cooperation in the region through initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD).

Recommendations

What the Experts Recommended Earlier in 2023:

In March 2023, the Carnegie Corporation of New York asked their grantees their perspectives on how to stabilize the US-China relations. The grantees proffered a broad range of specific actions for both the United States and China. They were asked what [‘actions on each side that could help lower the temperature in this increasingly adversarial relationship?’](#)

My analysis of their responses suggests that the consensus view across these grantees was that the United States and China should engage in measures that promote stability, understanding, and cooperation in their bilateral relationship. These measures included:

1. **Enhancing communication:** Establishing and maintaining high-level communication channels, including military-to-military dialogues, to manage differences and prevent misunderstandings.

2. **Encouraging people-to-people exchanges:** Increasing cultural, educational, and professional interactions to build mutual understanding and trust between the citizens of both countries.
3. **Managing crises:** Limiting actions that could trigger crises, particularly in sensitive areas such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, to avoid escalation.
4. **Clarifying policies:** Articulating and adhering to clear policies on contentious issues to provide predictability and reduce the chances of miscalculation.
5. **Maintaining connectivity:** Resuming regular flights and smoothing out visa processes to facilitate travel and meetings, thereby keeping open lines of communication and engagement.

Overall, the grantees agreed on the need for proactive and constructive engagement to mitigate the risks of conflict and to build a framework for coexistence despite the competitive nature of the relationship.

However, the grantees exhibited differences in the detail of how to best manage the US-China relationship, I would argue primarily based on their world view (realism or neo-realism, offensive or defensive realists, liberalism, liberal institutionalism, constructivists)

- **M. Taylor Fravel** suggested that both countries should acknowledge each other's legitimate interests to set the terms of coexistence, recognizing that as major powers, they must find a way to live alongside one another. M. Taylor Fravel might be associated with **Realism**, as his suggestion for the U.S. and China to identify each other's legitimate interests and set terms of coexistence aligns with the realist focus on power and national interests in an anarchic international system.
- **Jessica Chen Weiss** proposed a tacit agreement to limit actions that could trigger crises, particularly around Taiwan and the South China Sea, to prevent an action-reaction spiral that could escalate tensions. Robert Daly suggests that China should stop blaming the U.S. for all bilateral frictions and that the U.S. should articulate and abide by a new One-China policy that opposes both Taiwan's independence and China's use of force. Jessica Chen Weiss might align with **Liberalism**, as her emphasis on tacit agreements to limit actions that could trigger crises suggests a belief in cooperation and the establishment of norms to prevent conflict escalation.
- **Paul Haenle** emphasized the need for high-level and robust communication channels, including military-to-military dialogues, to better manage the relationship despite growing differences. Paul Haenle's view could be associated with Liberal Institutionalism. His emphasis on the need for high-level and robust communication channels, including military-to-military dialogues, to stabilize the U.S.-China bilateral relationship suggests a belief in the power of institutions and structured dialogue to manage complex relationships and prevent conflict. This aligns with the liberal institutionalist perspective that international regimes and institutions play a crucial role in fostering cooperation and providing mechanisms for conflict resolution.
- **Nadège Rolland** argued that the deep-seated antagonism between the two countries cannot be fixed by simple gestures, but both could work to reduce the risk of accidental confrontation in various domains, provided there is a genuine willingness

to negotiate. Nadège Rolland could be associated with **Realism** or **Neorealism**, as her view that deep-seated antagonism cannot be fixed by simple gestures but rather through efforts to reduce the risk of accidental confrontation reflects a focus on power dynamics and strategic interactions.

- **Bonny Lin** pointed out that maintaining connectivity through diplomatic and military engagements, trade, and increasing people-to-people exchanges can slow the deterioration of relations. Bonny Lin's view could be associated with **Realism**. Her perspective that maintaining connectivity through diplomatic and military engagements, trade, and increasing people-to-people exchanges can slow the deterioration of relations suggests a pragmatic approach to managing competition and distrust. This aligns with the realist focus on power and national interests, as well as the understanding that states must engage in diplomacy and strategic interactions to navigate an anarchic international system.
- **Jude Blanchette** called for Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Chinese leader Xi Jinping to reaffirm their commitment to long-standing policies like the One-China policy, with actions to match their statements. Jude Blanchette's view could be associated with **Liberal Institutionalism**. His suggestion that high-level officials in the U.S. and China should uphold and articulate commitments to long-standing policies like the One-China policy, and follow up with actions that match their statements, implies a belief in the power of international norms and institutions to manage state behavior and foster cooperation. This aligns with the liberal institutionalist perspective that emphasizes the role of international regimes and institutions in mitigating conflict and promoting stability through cooperation and adherence to agreed-upon rules.
- **Keisha Brown** highlighted the importance of reinvigorating people-to-people relations to foster understanding, cooperation, and collaboration at the individual level. Keisha Brown could be associated with **Liberalism** or **Constructivism**, as her focus on reinvigorating people-to-people relations to foster understanding, cooperation, and collaboration at the individual level suggests a belief in the power of social interactions and cultural exchange to shape international relations. This aligns with constructivist ideas that emphasize the role of social constructs, identities, and human agency in international affairs. It also resonates with liberalist views on the importance of transnational relations and the potential for individuals and non-state actors to contribute to international cooperation.
- **Orville Schell** recommended that President Biden and Xi Jinping appoint trusted individuals to develop policy suggestions for a more stable relationship. Orville Schell's view could be associated with **Liberal Institutionalism**. His suggestion that President Biden and Xi Jinping appoint trusted individuals to develop policy suggestions for a more stable relationship implies a belief in the power of institutions and dialogue to resolve international conflicts. This aligns with the liberal institutionalist perspective that emphasizes the role of international regimes and institutions in mitigating conflict and promoting stability through cooperation and adherence to agreed-upon rules.
- **Susan Shirk** advises that the U.S. should compete by investing more and achieving more without closing doors to collaboration, maintaining openness as the secret to

American success. Susan Shirk's view could be associated with **Liberalism**, as her suggestion that the U.S. should compete by investing more and achieving more without closing doors to collaboration reflects a belief in the power of openness, international cooperation, and the positive-sum nature of international relations, which are key tenets of liberalism.

Expert	Grantee Organization	Suggested Measure
Orville Schell	Arthur Ross Director, Center on U.S.-China Relations, Asia Society	Propose high-level meetings between trusted officials or policy experts to develop policy suggestions for a more stable relationship.
M. Taylor Fravel	Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science and Director, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Identify each other's legitimate interests to set the terms of coexistence and limit the scope and intensity of competition.
Keisha Brown	Associate Professor, Tennessee State University; Cofounder and Co-CEO, Black China Caucus	Reinvigorate people-to-people relations to foster understanding, cooperation, and collaboration at the individual level.
Jude Blanchette	Freeman Chair in China Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies	Have high-level officials uphold and articulate commitments to long-standing policies like the One-China policy with matching actions.
Susan Thornton	Director, Forum on Asia-Pacific Security, National Committee on American Foreign Policy	Resume regular flights and smooth out visa issuance obstacles to facilitate travel and meetings between the two countries.
Paul Haenle	Maurice R. Greenberg Director's Chair, Carnegie China, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Establish and sustain high-level communication channels, including military-to-military dialogues.
Susan Shirk	Freeman Chair in China Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies	Compete by investing more and achieving more without closing doors to collaboration, maintaining openness.
Nadège Rolland	Distinguished Fellow, China Studies, The National Bureau of Asian Research	Reduce the risk of accidental confrontation in various domains, provided there is a genuine willingness to negotiate.
Bonny Lin	Director, China Power Project, and Senior Fellow, Asian Security, Center for Strategic and International Studies	Maintain connectivity through diplomatic and military engagements, trade, and increase people-to-people exchanges.
Robert Daly	Director, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, The Wilson Center	China should stop blaming the U.S. for all bilateral frictions, and the U.S. should articulate and abide by a new One-China policy.

Table 3 Carnegie Corporation of New York asked their grantees their perspectives on how to stabilize the US-China relations.

While it is difficult to list here any meaningful recommendations that have not already been made would manage the complex and challenging relationship between the United States and China, policymakers, it on both sides should:

1. Continue to engage in high-level dialogue essential for building trust and understanding between the two countries.

2. Work together to address common challenges, such as climate change and nuclear proliferation. This will help to build a more cooperative relationship.
3. Manage their differences constructively to avoid confrontation and finding ways to compromise.
4. Respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity is essential for maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Specific ways in which the two countries can establish mutual trust:

1. **Engage in regular and open communication:** The two countries need to communicate with each other clearly and honestly, both at the official and unofficial levels.
2. **Increase transparency:** The two countries need to be more transparent about their military activities, economic policies, and political intentions.
3. **Resolve disputes peacefully:** The two countries need to develop mechanisms for resolving disputes peacefully, such as through diplomacy, mediation, or arbitration.
4. **Cooperate on issues of common interest:** The two countries can build trust by cooperating on issues of mutual interest, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and global health.

Closing Notes

This essay does not delve into the potential political opposition, economic costs, or social implications that might arise from implementing these policies. Implementing the proposed policies for managing the U.S.-China relationship could face various forms of opposition and have several implications. These include domestic political opposition, both in the US and China, economic costs, and social implications.

Domestic political actors in both the U.S. and China may view cooperation as a sign of weakness or as a compromise of national interests, leading to pushback against engagement efforts. There may be resistance to policies that are perceived to be too accommodating to the other side, especially on contentious issues like human rights, trade practices, and territorial disputes. High-level engagement and adherence to policies like the One-China policy could be politically sensitive and controversial, potentially leading to opposition from political factions within the U.S. that favor a more confrontational approach.

Addressing unfair trade policies and non-market economic practices may lead to economic retaliation or trade disputes, which could have negative impacts on businesses and consumers in both countries. Efforts to prevent the use of advanced US technologies for undermining national security could limit trade and investment opportunities, potentially affecting economic growth.

Reinvigorating people-to-people relations could lead to greater mutual understanding and collaboration, but it may also face skepticism or resistance from populations influenced by nationalistic sentiments. Human rights concerns, such as those in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, are significant social issues that could impede the development of a cooperative relationship if not adequately addressed. The detention of American citizens in China and the

handling of such cases could have social implications, affecting public opinion and the willingness of people to engage with China.

Therefore, while the proposed policies aim to manage competition and foster cooperation, they could encounter political opposition, economic costs, and social implications that would need to be carefully navigated to ensure successful implementation.

Conclusions

Analysis of the language and the rhetoric employed by President Biden and President Xi revealed a fundamental shift in the relationship that has as its objective, to avoid military conflict by responsibly managing competition between China and the United States.

This will be achieved by China and the United States:

1. Conducting high-level engagement to manage bilateral relations and address global challenges.
2. Fostering open dialogue to build mutual trust.
3. Resuming high-level military to military communication to avoid miscommunication and miscalculations.

It was evident that China and the United States has entered a new era characterized by *strategic maneuvering*, the primary objective of which is to achieve one's goals without resorting to the use of military force.

Despite the shift in the relationship between China and the United States, there has been no corresponding change in the underlying policies of either Great Power. Hence, there is a risk any mutual trust and credibility may be eroded when actions don't match the rhetoric. However, the change in rhetoric has the potential to create a space for diplomacy and dialogue that did not exist previously, that can act as a safeguard against conflict.

There exist potential challenges to the trajectory of the relationship between China and the United States. First, and foremost is the deep structural rivalry that exists between them, and a level of mistrust that will be an obstacle for the creation and maintenance of a truly cooperative relationship.

Second, and importantly are the domestic constraints each leader faces that could limit their capacity for cooperation. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains tight control over foreign policy through a combination of institutional structures, ideological indoctrination, and personal loyalty but there is also a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism among its members and the Chinese people that may perceive cooperation with the United States as a sign of weaknesses in the CCP's leadership. In the United States, there is bipartisan concern about China's growing power and its challenge to American interests.

Third, the United States has a network of strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific, including the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. These alliances are a key part of the US security posture in the region, and any significant shift in US-China relations could have implications for these alliances. How these alliances will be impacted is the subject of a forthcoming IPSC Policy Brief.

About the Author

Dr Hugh Tuckfield is a political theorist and human rights lawyer with a career that spans academia, law, and international consultancy. His expertise in international human rights, international relations, and political science has made him a popular voice in both scholarly and legal circles. Hugh's academic journey began at Monash University, where he earned bachelor's degrees in economics and law. He further expanded his knowledge with a Master of Human Rights and Democratization (Asia-Pacific Region) from the University of Sydney and the Kathmandu School of Law. His commitment to research led him to complete his doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney in the Discipline of Government and International Relations. In the legal arena, Hugh has been admitted to practice as a Barrister and Solicitor in the Supreme Court of Victoria, reflecting his proficiency in law and dedication to justice. Hugh's academic contributions extend beyond his studies. He has held positions as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, a WZB Sydney University Merit Fellow at the WZB Social Science Center in Berlin, and an associate of the Sydney Asia Pacific Migration Center. These roles have allowed him to engage in innovative research and collaboration with fellow scholars. He has consulted for the UN, state, and federal governments in Australia and provided advice to international and national human rights organizations. His insights and expertise have contributed to shaping policies and practices that uphold human rights and democratic principles. A prolific writer and speaker, Hugh has presented papers at numerous international conferences and published articles and papers on human rights and refugee studies. His writings contribute to the ongoing discourse on critical issues affecting our global society. As an educator, Hugh has lectured at the University of Sydney and the Kathmandu School of Law on subjects such as international human rights, research methods, and the regional and global governance of migration. His teaching reflects his passion for knowledge-sharing and mentorship, ignited by a belief in the power of collective achievement and a conviction that organizational excellence isn't a solitary pursuit, but the result of each member's contributions. His passion lies in empowering every individual, fostering a culture where collaboration is the driving force and diverse strengths blend to create success. With a career that embodies a blend of scholarship, legal practice, and international advocacy, Hugh's goal is to inspire and influence those committed to the pursuit of human rights, justice, and democratic governance.