

## ANALYZING THE TRUMPISM IN THE US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CHINA: THE CONTINUITY OF COLD WAR

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines Trump's foreign policy towards China and its impacts on the trade relations between the United States (US) and China. Trump's China-specific policy had great impacts on diplomatic and political relations. China's global strategic policy was viewed as a global threat that immensely alarmed the Trump administration, which developed the notion of 'Trumpism.' The growing influence of China has raised concern for the US. Chinese military and economic engagements in Asia and beyond are viewed as a direct threat to US hegemony. The article delves into the strategic competition between the US and China as the New World War in the immensely politically polarized world and analyses the factors of the rivalry between the US and China. The main objective of this article is to interpret the US-China-centric policy that led to the New Cold War between the two major powers. We also explain the measures that amplified potential threats between the US and China.*

**Keywords:** *Trumpism, China, trade war, technology, rivalry, strategy, Xi-Jiping, politics, power.*

### INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War has not ended. The New Cold War had been fostered between the US and China during Trump's first presidency. The old Cold War existed between the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, that divided the world ideologically, economically, and politically. The US emerged as an exceptional and unilateral force after the Soviet's collapse. But the 9/11 incidents challenged the US supremacy and its unilateral order in the world. The terror attacks pushed the US to engage in curbing the terrorism beyond its borders. The US' engagement against terrorism definitely provided the smooth way for China to rise and take off strategically in world politics. China, during the end of the Cold War, was persistently developing its technology and

had become a competitor after the US's involvement in the war against terrorism.

The US framed its policy 'pivot to Asia' during Obama, but he continued relations with China. In the 1970s, the US recognized the importance of Communist China and defused its historical rivalry. President Jimmy Carter acknowledged the "One China" policy of China and granted full diplomatic status to China. The US had acknowledged the economic potential of China and granted access to China to its markets, desiring to transform China into a 'liberal world' so that China would accept the US military and cultural dominance. In 2000 the US Congress passed the "US-China Relations Act," which allowed China to enjoy normal trade relations with the US granted "permanent trade relations

status” in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 (Feng, 2020) . The US cooperative and normal posture provided China an opportunity to enjoy diplomatic and economic ties with the US. The Chinese economy started rapidly growing and emerged as the world's second-largest economy in 2010. Bilateral trade relations favoured China more than the US; China surpassed the US in technology and became influential in the Asia-Pacific.

The US ambitiously focused on Asia to contain its strategic, rising China in the Indo-Pacific region (The White House, 2022) and announced the “Pivot to Asia” strategy. The US changed the position of its foreign policy and shifted its policy from the Middle East and Europe to the Indo-Pacific region, where China could be a great threat to its strategic interests. Obama proposed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, and it was signed in 2016. This agreement was made to sideline China and to increase US influence. Twelve ‘Pacific’ countries were included in the multilateral trade agreement.<sup>1</sup> In response to the US ‘grand strategy’ and multilateralism, China also framed its joined and established<sup>2</sup> regional and bilateral institutions for implementing its strategy in the Asian region and beyond (Curriden, 2021). Although the US and China had divergences of interests, they continued to cooperate on various convergences of interests: global security, terrorism, and climate change. Climate change was an issue between the US and China, and both joined the Paris Summit (The Guardian, 2016) to curb this challenging issue. But both were indulged in trade war, human rights issues, and cybersecurity (Li, 2017). These issues commenced the New Cold War and seriously escalated rivalry during Trump's first administration. Trump’s foreign policy towards China had deep economic and diplomatic

implications that deteriorated bilateral relations between the US and China.

Trump came into power with this commitment to put ‘America First’ in his policies and actions. In the modern state system, states re-examine their relations and set priorities according to their ‘national interest.’ President Trump's antagonistic approach towards China ended the US’ engagement and cooperative policy with China. In his annual National Security Strategy (NSS), Trump characterized China as a “strategic rival” (National Security Strategy of the US, 20017) and labeled China as a “revisionist power” that would challenge US supremacy and World Order and would shift the regional balance in its favor. The US NSS reflected the growing strategic competition with China. Most Americans viewed China’s development as a critical threat to US interests (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023). The US Department (2017) observed that “China is enhancing its power and violating the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regulations and threatens the global norms.” China-Taiwan relations, China’s policy in Hong Kong, and human rights violations in Xinjiang were grave issues to the Trump administration.

No American president in history considered China as a ‘potential threat’ but had designated China a “threatening competitor” and drew a line in the New Cold War. Trump’s administration also painted China as an ‘interventionist’ state that had meddled in the US midterm elections (BBC, 2018). Secretary Pence’s accusation was perceived as an era of the New Cold War (Borger, 2018) between the two powerful international rivals. Secretary of State Pompeo” identified China as an "increasingly authoritarian state at home and aggressive in its hostility to freedom everywhere else (U.S. Department, 2020). He urged that the “free world must change Communist China; otherwise, Communist China will change the free world." Both Pence and Pompeo were tough and concerned about the Chinese dominance and hegemony that would dominate the international order and urged the US to “confront China’s Communist Party.” The blame game persisted during Trump’s first term and increased confrontation with rising China.

<sup>1</sup>. The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) is a free trade agreement that would liberalize trade and investment between 12 Pacific-rim countries- New Zealand, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Viet Nam. But the US has withdrawn from this agreement

<sup>2</sup> For instance China established SCO and collaborated with Russia on common issues

Trump's determination to put "America First" made the US more assertive in its foreign policy. Trump and his administration re-examined the 'policies of constructive engagements' with China and implemented a "confrontational strategy to contain the rise of China" (Haenle & Bresnik 2022) and the US opted for some measures to compete with Chinese trade and technology—Trump launched a trade war (Arezina, 2019) and made new partners vis-à-vis China. To reduce the trade imbalance with China Trump imposed heavy, a series, tariffs on Chinese goods and prompted a trade war between the US and China- it also expanded into the technological sector. and made new partners vis-à-vis China. To reduce the trade imbalance with China, Trump imposed a heavy series of tariffs on Chinese goods and prompted a trade war between the US and China; it also expanded into the technological sector. Trump took numerous steps that deeply deteriorated bilateral relations: he developed diplomatic relations with Taiwan, launched Quadrilateral Security Dialogues (QUAD) to restrain China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region, and grew autonomy of navigation and military engagements (Usher, 2020). The US included Australia, Japan, and India to contain China's influence and supremacy in the Indo-Pacific region. The US-China relations became critical and troublesome; both countries were confronted with trade and technological issues, human rights violations, and regional security. The US-China confrontational policies augmented diplomatic tension and security uncertainties between the two powerful states, and Trump developed the notion of 'Trumpism' in US foreign policy. President Trump increased the geopolitical (strategic) rivalry and ideological tension between the US and China. After the end of an ideological conflict with the Soviet Union, Trump added that historical text to his approach, and a strategic rivalry took place between the democratic and non-democratic states.

The rise of China has increased the insecurity of the US and its allies. China is modernizing its military in the Indo-Pacific region. The dominance of China in the Indo-Pacific region compelled the Trump administration to opt for an assertive policy towards China that worsened

bilateral relations (Rachman, 2020). The Trump administration viewed "Chinese assertiveness as more dangerous than the Soviet Union" (Kupchan, 2019). China's military modernization in the Indo-Pacific region is a direct threat to US interests in the Pacific region. To counter each other, both the US and China are making alliances to protect their strategic interests. Diplomatic tension followed by the trade and technological confrontation increasingly put both countries in an awkward situation. China expelled the US journalist who criticized Chinese authorities. in response to that Chinese action, the US also put restrictions on the Chinese officials involved in human rights violations (Walt, 2020). These disputes restricted the possibility of cooperation between the US and China and augmented the strategic competition in different peripheries.

Strategic rivalry between the US and China has changed the dynamics of bilateral relations and upset the rest of the world. This article methodically explores 'Trumpism' in US foreign policy and the nature of the confrontation. This paper attempts to answer the question: How did Trump's foreign policy toward China exacerbate relations with China? How does China compel the US administration to review its aggressive policy and normalize its relations with its competitors? In this paper we have employed 'neo-classical realism' theory to comprehend the foreign relations between the two states in the modern state system. Rose Gideon coined the term 'neo-classical realism' in 1998. "Neoclassical realism claims that the scope and desire of a state's foreign policy is determined first and foremost by the state's relative material power.

### **A Paradigm Shift in the Us Foreign Policy: China Factor**

Foreign policy reflects the states' behavior which is determined by the state and stakeholders. President Trump was known as a tough leader toward his rivals. He opted for new patterns to challenge the US' strategic competitor, Xi Jinping, the Chinese president who rationally executed his policies and made China compete with the US. A rising China had been a serious matter to the previous US administrations, but the US was ready to acknowledge China's 'system' in the



global world” (Arežina, 2019) . Trump’s regime assumed that China was preparing to dominate the US. But there were some scholars who were of the view that “the US effort to treat China as an enemy and decouple from the global economy would damage the US’ international role and reputation” (Fravel, 2019), but Trump was persistent in continuing anti- and hostile policy against China.

Geopolitical interests, ideological tension, and the worldwide economic policies of China were the main irritants of this new Cold War. On the ideological front, the Trump Administration launched a strong campaign to criticize the Communist Party of China and considered China an ideological threat to US hegemony and its world order. President Trump became assertive and increased the influence in the South China Sea and strengthened diplomatic relations with Taiwan, ignoring the ‘one China’ policy. Trump withdrew from many multilateral international agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Summit on Climate Change. China, as a rising power, “wanted to reshape the existing global order and promoted its governance model and ideology” (Ashbee & Hurst, 2021) which alarmed the Trump Administration.

The US policy towards China remained troubling, ending the policy of engagement and escalating confrontation because China had risen as an economic power. China’s ambitions to change the current global political and security order raised serious concerns for the Trump Administration that eventually forced the US to adopt a confrontational approach towards China. Trump’s predecessors had an engagement policy toward China to decrease China’s influence in global affairs, and they measured China as a “strategic partner.” President Bill Clinton’s administration, which was criticized by his predecessor Bush, wanted to cognize Taiwan as an independent state and China to be viewed as a “strategic competitor, not a strategic partner (Lippman, 1999). But during Trump’s era, an extraordinary change arose in US policy towards China. Trump viewed the previous US-China engagement as ‘ineffective’ instead of China emerging as an “arrogant” (Hurst & Ashbee, 2021) state and potentially challenging US domination at regional

and global levels by fostering its international economic project, the BRI.

The American foreign policy has never been the same in the past or present. It keeps changing according to the global strategic environment. Trump also decided to revisit US relations with its foes and friends; he changed the US-China policy over three major assertions. First, the US accused China of not following the rules of the World Trade Organization, and being involved in unfair trade practices. Secondly, according to Five Eyes<sup>3</sup>, China was involved in cyber theft to steal US trade secrets and ‘intellectual property’ by using artificial intelligence. Third, China’s increasing military transformation in the Western Pacific region—covering twenty-eight diverse countries—alarmed the US and its allies in the region (Yao, 2021).

### **The Patterns of Trump’s Policy and China**

States are struggling for economic independence and economic supremacy in the contemporary world. The US-China bilateral trade has witnessed an important growth in the world economy. China has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 2001, and it has been the largest export market for the US. The US imports from China were about \$100 billion and increased to \$500 billion in 2021—extremely emerging trade is highly important for both states (Siripurapu & Berman, 2024). The US has become one of the major importers of Chinese goods. Owing to the extensive imports from China, several manufacturing damages happened in the US. China is a low-cost manufacturing center in the world that has a considerable impact on the world economy, including the US. The import-export imbalance was the main factor of trade differences in the US-China trade relations. The US accused China of unfair trade practices. Trade imbalance forced technology transfer and cyber theft (Siripurapu & Berman, 2024). However, the Trump Administration adopted more assertive measures against China.

<sup>3</sup> Security alliance of the U.S,UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada- the main objective of Five Eyes is to monitor the global *security* threat landscape

Trump widely criticized China's admission into the World Trade Organization. He was determined to impose tariffs on China (Joseph, 2022) because he believed that Chinese policies were harmful to the US. He announced the US-China new trade policy and put heavy tariffs on Chinese trade. Trump complained that "China buys fewer US goods than the US buys from China; consequently, the White House levied 25% on \$250 billion of Chinese goods. However, China retaliated by imposing higher import tariffs on US products (Wieviroak, 2024) of up to 25% on US products worth \$113 billion (Partington, 2019). Trump evoked section 301 of the Trade Act 1974. The trade war not only failed to achieve its objectives; it also hurt the US business community and consumers (Manak, 2023).

Trump's trade policy against China was considered a 'trade war' in the world. The US considered China's increasing tariff on US products 'unjust' and 'unfair' and imposed the new tariffs on China. President Trump did not stop increasing heavy tariffs on China. He imposed 25% tariffs on \$16 billion worth of imports from China in August 2018. China also responded to the Trump policy and "imposed 25% tariffs on 16 billion worth of imports from the US. In September 2018, Trump imposed 10% more tariffs on \$200 billion worth of imports from China, and again China retaliated by imposing 5% to 10% tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US products" (BBC News, 2018). China, mainly, targeted agricultural imports from the US, whereas Trump imposed tariffs on aluminium and steel.

The trade war increased negative impacts on the US-China economy. After striking three rounds of tariffs on each other, both presidents of the US and China agreed on a settlement of the bilateral dispute. At the G-20 Summit, Trump and Xi Jinping reciprocally reached an agreement to talk about the existing trade tension. But the talks ended without success; consequently, Trump declared to increase tariffs from 10% to 25% on \$200 billion of Chinese products in May 2019. China responded by imposing additional tariffs on \$60 billion of US goods. These actions escalated tensions, and the trade war increased and spread into the technology sectors. The Trump

Administration revised its national security to change the policy for direct investments by foreign companies. This particular strategy was implemented to prevent Chinese companies from gaining advanced technologies through direct investment in the US tech sector. The Trump Administration made an entity list and banned many Chinese companies, including Huawei and ZTE, companies of telecommunications (Kwan, 2020).

One year after the trade war, the ice melted between the US and China. On the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in 2019 in Japan, both leaders Trump and Xi Jinping, developed a consensus to resume talks on trade issues. President Trump agreed that no new tariffs would be imposed on China. Soon Trump backed off from his commitment and announced the imposition of 10% additional tariffs on \$300 billion of Chinese goods. Subsequently, China imposed tariffs of \$75 billion worth on US goods. On the same day, Trump announced an increased additional 5% tariff on Chinese goods. In response, China announced its fourth round of tariffs on US goods and devalued its currency (Reuters, 2019).

The trade war between the US and China amplified economic uncertainty in the international markets. Trump urged US companies to explore new markets instead of China. In September 2019, the US and China jointly decided to postpone the tariff increase. After many rounds of bilateral talks, China reached a deal and stopped further tariffs. China, according to the deal, had to buy \$200 billion worth of US products within the next two years and also agreed to take steps to safeguard against intellectual property theft. The US and China finally signed a "Phase One" trade deal (United States Trade Representative, 2020). Despite a deal, the US and China would not end the rivalry over trade policies during the pandemic-COVID-19. Trump's executive order in 2020 restricted US companies from doing business with Chinese companies that had links with the Chinese military and imposed restrictions on Chinese goods over human rights violations in Xinjiang (Pamuk, 2020). The China-US trade war increased economically and politically.

## China and Currency Devaluation and Technological Race

A major twist in the trade war was seriously triggered when it turned into a currency war by China. The US declared China a “currency manipulator” (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2019). The Chinese Yuan fell 7% against the US dollar. Currency devaluation was a new strategy of China in the trade conflict with the US. The center of power has shifted from traditional to digital power—the 21st century has changed the dynamics of power politics and states’ behaviors. Modern technology has dominated “the battleground to achieve dominance and power. China and the US are the leading states in capturing technological supremacy. However, to take over US technology and to lessen China’s dependency on foreign technology, China initiated the “Made in China 2025” plan in 2015. This plan indicated that China wanted to lead the world in advanced technology (McBride & Chatzky, 2019). It was China’s first action plan on promoting manufacturing and focused heavily on innovation and technology (Tiezze, 2015). On the other hand, a rising China has become a potential threat to the US with its divergent political system and Communist ideology that would not allow the US to accept a different global order and governance system.

After the end of the Cold War, China’s technological advancement amazed the world, and it upgraded the Chinese military strength (Yao, 2020). The US has been accusing China of using technology to enhance its military capabilities. Thus China’s military modernization was the main factor that forced the US to impose sanctions on Chinese technology.

The states’ rivalry never stopped if they continued to undermine their rivals. The US’s policy of allegation continued and blamed Chinese technology, Huawei, for cyber spying and “stealing property rights.” To stop China’s activity, the Trump Administration wanted help from its Five Eyes allies, such as Japan, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia, to take harsh action against Chinese cyber intelligence and intellectual property. To show solidarity with its ally, the Canadian authorities arrested the Huawei chief financial officer in December 2018 (McCullough,

2021), but she was released under Chinese pressure.

Trump’s China-centric policies had no limit—the US scientists and universities were collaborating with China. In American universities, Chinese students have limited access to the fields of manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and cutting-edge technologies. Several Chinese workers were terminated from technological companies and accused of stealing trade secrets (Ruters, 2019). Mike Pompeo accused the Chinese students of coming to the US for Intellectual property theft “They have ties with the People’s Liberation Army,” and urged the universities to limit education opportunities for Chinese students (Aljazeera News, 2020).

## The Rising Ideological Conflict: Continuity of Old Cold War

Ideological factors play a major role in foreign policy. Throughout the Cold War, both the US and the Soviet Union were engaged in ideological conflict owing to their different political systems. After the end of the Cold War, ideological phenomena significantly persisted among the states. The major difference between the US and China is their ideology, which increased mistrust—the US opted for various tactics to criticize the Chinese system. Trump labeled the Chinese “ideological struggle as democracy versus autocracy, and China labeled it as effective governance versus ineffective governance.” “China’s governance and statecraft are the oldest and the most successful the world has ever seen, and China’s history and culture are profoundly different from that of the West” (Jacques, 2021). During an international conference, Chinese leaders viewed their country’s role in global governance and also depicted that China would face a power transition with the US in the future (Heath, 2018). Currently, China is facing challenges owing to its exceptional ideology and governance model in the international system.

Political-ideological tension and ‘power transition’ always increase the gulf between the states. During the Cold War, the US and China were distanced due to ideological conflict and the political rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. However, the Trump Administration drew



new lines of confrontation in its relations with China, which had many characteristics of an emerging New Cold War (Yao, 2021). The US ended an engagement with China and viewed China's strategic competition as an ideological conflict. In his speech, the US Vice President, Pence, strongly criticized China's external and internal policies and accused China of not only using the authoritarian approach to control its people but also claiming that it was Vice President interfering in American democracy and trying to change the global order to benefit itself (Tiezze, 2018). Due to its aggressive hawkish language, this speech is referred to as a new shift in US policy.

The former state secretary, Pompeo, was critical of China. He stated, "China is a bigger and more complex threat than the former Soviet Union because, despite its Communist ideology, China is part of the free world, and the US cannot handle this threat alone. So, it is the need of the time to create a global alliance of democracies to contain China (Borger, 2018). Graham Allison also emphasizes that the US and China might fall into the "Thucydides Trap" due to major differences in cultural values, domestic politics, and military capability between both sides. The US is a democratic republic, while under the rule of the Communist Party, China is an authoritarian state—thus opposing perspectives regarding political legitimacy caused tension in bilateral relations (Allison, 2017). But Xi Jinping said, "There is no such thing as the so-called Thucydides Trap in the world, "but should major countries time and again make the mistakes of strategic calculation, they might create traps for themselves" (Allison, 2015). Indeed, the rising powers create potential threats to the existing powers. Athens's rise became a great threat to Sparta's state in the Greek period and compelled them to make allies to defend them.

### **Trump's Taiwan Policy: An Irritant for China**

Strategic autonomy has been a key element of US policy. But in the current and past history, the US administrations were involved in interfering in the internal issues of the states. China-Taiwan relations have been conflictual since 1949. In 1979, US President Jimmy Carter recognized

China's "One China" policy that aimed for Taiwan to be part of China and ended its official relations with Taiwan. After recognizing the People's Republic of China, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to redefine its relations with Taiwan. According to TRA, "the US cannot establish its formal and diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but cultural and commercial relations can be maintained through unofficial relations." Since then, US-Taiwan relations have been maintained under TRA (Kuehn, 2021). But Trump took a hard stance on China and accused China of destroying the US economy. Trump got a congratulatory call from the Taiwan president, Tsai, that upset the diplomatic relations between the US and China. It was an unprecedented incident in US-Taiwan relations. In 2018, Trump signed a bill that encouraged the US officials to visit Taiwan. Two senior US officials visited Taiwan for the first time since 1979 and antagonized China; China urged the US and Taiwan to stop the exchange of officials (Westcott, 2018). The Trump Administration increased its cooperation with Taiwan, and it intensified its rivalry with China.

The Trump administration transformed Taiwan policy, which was an irritant for China. The US increased arms sales to Taiwan and approved the \$18 billion arms deals. Even the Trump Administration made a policy that enabled Taiwan to buy F-16 fighter jets from the US. The Trump administration also increased the navy vessel movement in the Taiwan Strait. Trump's policy towards Taiwan was a clear indication that President Trump wanted to be tough on China and wanted to contain China at any cost. Trade was the major issue of Trump's regime, but China was more concerned about US-Taiwan relations. Therefore, the Trump Administration used Taiwan as a "bargaining chip" to get what it wanted from China (Sui, 2016). The US paradigm in its foreign policy in strengthening the ties with Taiwan intensified the rivalry with China.

### **Trump- China Tension during Global Pandemic: A Potential Tragedy**

The international crisis caused by the pandemic (politics) has been significantly changing the world's political setting. Rival states have always

blamed each other for the outbreak of any pandemic that affected the global economic, political, and security environment. The coronavirus disease, COVID-19, intensified the rivalry and tensions between China and the US. Instead of working together to counter the worldwide crises, the US and China both created a “potential tragedy,” and the nature of the countries’ political realities led to the mismanagement of the worldwide crisis (Christensen, 2020) for the entire world. During the global pandemic crisis, the Trump Administration strongly blamed China’s role in spreading COVID-19. Trump painted China as a ‘villain’ (House & Parker, 2020). Both sides launched a blame game to strengthen their policy regarding the COVID-19 crisis. Secretary of State Pompeo claimed the virus was manufactured in the Wuhan laboratory. Trump said that he “knew all the evidence that indicated this virus was made in the Wuhan laboratory but was not in a position to share it. He labeled it “Chinese Virus” (Aljazeera, 2020). The Chinese media called his claim insane and evasive. This ‘tug of war’ increased the rivalry and uncertainty in the world. COVID-19 was an international crisis but exposed the nature of the rivalry between the US and China. The US and China were actively involved in a strategic rivalry. It started with trade, and technology expanded to the health sector and made the pandemic political. The development of vaccines had become a new magnitude of strategic rivalry between the US and China—they used it as diplomatic ‘leverage’ in East Asian countries—a significant strategic region for both powers (Chen, 2023). Both wanted maximum influence and support from the rest of the world.

### **Politics of the Human Rights: The US-China Rivalry**

During Trump’s first tenure, human rights issues were one of the most notable priorities of his administration to deal with China against human rights violations. Trump imposed sanctions on Chinese officials due to their involvement in human rights violations against the Muslim minority in Uyghur. The Trump Administration accused China of being involved in genocide in Xinjiang province (Wong & Verma, 2020).

Trump’s actions annoyed China and deteriorated the bilateral relations. In response, China also imposed sanctions on the US officials as the US imposed sanctions on the Chinese officials in Hong Kong (BBC News, 2020). Trump signed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020. The basic purpose of this bill was to pressurize China over Uyghur human rights abuse and allow the US to impose sanctions on China. The Trump administration blacklisted “eight Chinese tech companies and Chinese officials over Uyghur human rights abuse, and relations became more strained when the Trump administration supported the protests in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is an autonomous region of China. The British colonized it during the First Opium War but handed it over to China in 1997 under an agreement of “One Country, Two Systems”, although China significantly kept a hold on Hong Kong. The US and China have different stances on Hong Kong’s status. According to the US, under the 1984 Act, Hong Kong has considerable autonomy over social freedom, politics, and the economy, while China claims that Hong Kong has little amount of freedom in trade. However, the 2019 extradition bill questions China’s policy towards Hong Kong. Due to nationwide massive protests and international criticism eventually, Hong Kong authorities withdrew from this bill. However, China imposed a National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020. This law allows China to shape the policies in Hong Kong (BBC News, 2020). This National Security Law allows China’s significant influence over Hong Kong.

The US extended its support to the protesters and criticized China. To stop China’s action in Hong Kong, the US Congress passed legislation known as the “Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.” Both the US and China engaged in a diplomatic rivalry. China responded to the US actions that “the US is interfering in internal matters of China and backed the protestors in Hong Kong” (Cheng, 2019). Trump’s Hong Kong policy seriously damaged the diplomatic relations in the East Asian region. Since 1979, China has had good diplomatic and economic relations with the US, especially after China entered into the World Trade Organization, Both the US and China are economically interdependent.



### **Xi Jinping's A Transformative Leadership Style: Rise of Trumpism vs Xi Jinpingism**

In states' policies, leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping and transforming the destiny of a nation. In the US and China, two different personalities were ruling their countries with different approaches. Trump prompted 'Trumpism' and shaped hard policies toward China. On the other hand, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, continued the implementation of peaceful and internationally recognized "five principles of co-existence"<sup>4</sup> (Global Times, 2024). In China's foreign policy. Thus Xiism would excel in the Chinese notion of peaceful rise that annoyed the Trump Administration, which viewed China's rise as a great threat and contradictory to the Western norms of democracy and peace. The distinctive characteristics of Donald Trump and Xi Jinping's personalities drew a distinct aspect of the US-China conflict. Xi Jinping's transformative approach is greatly helping China to rise and expand its influence at a global level. In 2013, Xi Jinping came into power; he had a vision of the national transformation of China:

It is the ambitious dream of China, which aims to build a powerful China again that matches the ancient, glorious China. This ambitious Chinese dream consists of four parts. First, to make an economically, politically, militarily, and scientifically strong China. Second, to make China more civilized which has high moral values and rich culture. Third, to make China harmonious. Fourth, to make China beautiful, which has a healthy environment and low pollution. The national rejuvenation of China was a dream of Chinese leaders from Sun Yat-sen to

<sup>4</sup> Recently, president Xi Jiping delivered a speech at the conference on "Carrying forward the five principles of peaceful co-existence and jointly building a community with a shared future for mankind", China celebrated 70 years of Five Principles of its foreign policy- mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, on-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and equal benefit and peaceful co-existence. These five principles were expounded by the Premier Zhou Enlai when he met Indian delegation in 1953 followed by the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Lal Nehru.

Deng Xiaoping, but Xi Jinping laid the foundation of the Chinese dream (Kuhn, 2013).

Xi Jinping implemented several transformative measures to boost the Chinese economy. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious plan. BRI boosted China's influence within Asia and beyond. BRI is seen as a "grand strategy" in international politics, and many actors are focusing on China. In dealing with the US, especially during the Trump Administration, Xi Jinping had opted for a risk-taking diplomatic approach on issues such as trade war, technological competition, and handling the COVID-19 pandemic that was largely focused on pursuing China's goals internationally (Lippert & Pethes, 2020).

To reduce dependency on foreign technology and advanced manufacturing, Xi Jinping initiated the "Made in China 2025" plan. It is a strategic initiative of China; it aims to transform China from a manufacturing-based economy to a global tech economy, and these Chinese initiatives became the primary reason for the Trump Administration to launch a trade war with China (Kennedy, 2015). The US withdrew itself from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Agreement, and the Iran Nuclear Deal. Trump's behaviour created an opportunity for China to step into the soft power vacuum to rise. China utilized this opportunity and promoted multilateralism, trade, and its vision for global governance and China. Due to the vacuum created by the Trump administration, China achieved its goals (The Conversation, 2018) by adding the tool of 'soft power' in its foreign policy and creating space in Asia and Africa.

China effectively used the tool of soft power in its foreign policy to counter the US strategies globally. To promote its culture and language, China funded the Confucius Institute in American universities—New York, Washington, Alabama, California, and Georgia. The US aimed to promote Chinese culture and language in the US, but the US criticized that "it limits educational freedom, and China used it to enhance its political influence in the US" (BBC News, 2020). In 2021, 104 Confucius institutes were closed to stop the 'soft power tool' by the Chinese government.

## Conclusion

We observed the strong wave of the New Cold War during Trump's first term. President Trump's China-centric policies established 'Trumpism in American foreign policy' in international politics. During his period, anti-China policy was multifaceted and intensified strategic competition and tensions between the US and China. Trump ended the US's policy of engagement with China and outlined an assertive foreign policy to deal with China on multiple issues. This major shift in the Trump Administration's policy towards China was framed as a New Cold War to contain China as the US's strategic competitor. The Trump administration focused its policies on China because China took off economically and strategically after the Cold War. The trade war and the Covid-19 crisis became "potential tragedies" between the two world powers. Technological advancement, human rights violations, and Taiwan issues reshaped the nature of bilateral relations between the US and China. Both powerful states were involved in undermining each other's hegemony and struggled to achieve dominance in trade, technology, and power politics.

Trump's trade war and China's response to his policy developed a new rivalry in world politics. During his first term, Trump had been the toughest president towards China. Whereas Chinese President Xi Jinping remained rational and persistently continued China's strategic policies to achieve its economic and security objectives. The post-Trump US, under Biden, normalized its relations with China even though the Biden administration proposed many anti-China policies—but they were ineffective. For example, the Quad and Build Back Better World (B3W) approach to contest China, so far, has been a mirage. Recently, Donald Trump has been elected the next president of the US—his second term may revisit his previous policies and would not change his anti-China policy and continue the New Cold War. But for a peaceful world, he may opt for the policy of "engagement" to surprise the world.

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