

## The Chinese Angle of American Foreign Policy: Assessing China's Manifested, Emerging and Unseen Powers

Mari KHOTIVRISHVILI\*

Gigi TSIKLARI\*\*

### Abstract

It is not a secret and neither has it needed deep political knowledge to understand that there is a big red rising giant that gains more and more power day by day.

China – being a Communist, still one of the biggest capitalist states – managed to balance between its harsh political system and liberal economy which brought it the status of a regional hegemon and took it to the highest economic ranks in the world.

China can be characterized as a unique state in a sense. There are several countries which are also Communist such as Vietnam, North Korea, or Cuba. So, what is so special about China? The answer may lie inside the method by which once rural China rose to be a prominent international player in the world.

The vast, one of the largest, free laissez-faire market is the fact that makes China unique. On the one hand there is a strict Communist system with one leading political party and Communist ideology and on the other hand there is economy similar to Western standards. The hypothesis that always comes to consideration while thinking about China is that China would not be able to survive if their market was not opened. With over one billion population and their demand, China had to provide adequate amount of supply, so it switched to free market economy.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, Belt, Road Initiative

---

\*Graduate of the International Relations BA Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education, International Black Sea University. E-mail: [mkhotivrishvili@yahoo.com](mailto:mkhotivrishvili@yahoo.com); [17400150@ibsu.edu.ge](mailto:17400150@ibsu.edu.ge)

\*\*Ph.D., Invited Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education, International Black Sea University. E-mail: [TsiklauriG@yahoo.com](mailto:TsiklauriG@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

### Characterizing the New Red Giant

Historically, as Allison (2015) argued, the rise of one state has always led to something new: new spheres of influence, alliances and unions, and most frequently, conflicts. Some examples can be brought from experience. Before the First World War would start, the rise of Germany was clear – high urbanization, economic welfare and prosperity, industrialization was all felt by its neighbours and non-neighbours; the result however, was the First major global war in history. Similar pattern can be applied to the Empire of Japan before the Second World War and likewise, the superpowers after this war contested each other in the Cold War.

As it is visible, the rise of one country always has possibility of being doubted by other major actors and these doubts very often escalate into tensions and in radical situation, in wars.

Before assessing the policies and attitude of the U.S. towards China, some information has to be provided about the People's Republic of China beforehand.

Generally, as it is known, China has one-party rule even though other political parties exist formally. The communist ruling party officially has over two hundred million people as strong supporters. Another important characteristic of China is that it tries to avoid the cult of personality. China still has in mind the effects of Maoism and Cultural Revolution with over twenty million Chinese deaths, but the number is still debated.

That is why, in order not to repeat same consequences, China changes its leadership and tries to avoid the creation of a new cult of personality. Still, some may debate that Xi Jinping, the President of China, is slowly transcending into the new sole leader.

In global arena, China takes the "win-win" approach – rare vetoes, non-interference and abstention. To bring China's position in UN Security

Council as an example, China habitually abstains. China abstained back in the 1990s after Bosnian War to call Srebrenica massacre genocide and likewise behaviour often happens.

What has to be also remembered is that China, even though most international society recognizes China as People's Republic of China, can be argued to have two separate states and governments: one Communist, another democratic one in Taiwan. China does not recognize Taiwan, Hong Kong and neither has it recognized Macau. Both Macau and Hong Kong have the status of special administrative regions. So, China is frequently referred as one state with two systems.

According to Ying and Shicun (2016), China has defensive strategy in the East and the South. With its ambitions over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea it puts question on its correct usage of military in this region. China claims eighty percent of the South China Sea against the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. China has on many occasions been criticized by these states, along with the U.S., about its action in the sea and construction of artificial islands which are not declared to have clear purpose in future.

Before turning to the African issue, Chinese interests in Latin America have to be brought as well. As Zhang (2019) argues, China has been assisting and guiding Latin states namely Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia and Trinidad and Tobago, promoting green projects, cooperating with governmental and non-governmental organizations and members and so on. It all unquestionably goes in line with high debt which Latin countries already have accumulated. Since 2007, China has loaned more than \$125 billion to Latin states and since launching the Belt and Road Initiative, Panama was one of the first volunteers to greet China.

If the economic, political and geopolitical interests are activated, the U.S. may soon be engaged in Chinese activities in the region, especially when it comes to Panama's close location and

historical bounds with the U.S. The U.S. has long time been warning Latin America about the debt-trap diplomacy of China, but currently it seems that Latin states and governments enjoy reduce of inflation, building new projects and infrastructure and flow of money; but peace is never guaranteed.

### **China in Africa – Economic Interest or Form of Neo-Colonialism?**

Chinese presence in Africa has been growing and alarming at the same time to many. Long before China would invest in China, they started to connect with Africa on ideological terms back in late 1960-70s as socialist and communist consciousness was common for them both.

Currently, according to the China Africa Research Initiative (2021), just between 2000-2019 China gave away \$153 billion to Africa as loans by creating more “red” areas in continent and putting biggest emphasis especially on countries like Angola with \$43 billion, Ethiopia \$14 billion, Kenya, Sudan, Congo and others. Nigeria is planned to have around 404 projects with 240 firms; Zambia will have 273 Chinese projects activated with over 125 firms and so on.

It can be surprising at one point that China invests billions of dollars in practically fake-states like Sudan or Ethiopia which are torn apart by civil wars and corruption; however, the answer can become clearer in near future. It may not be unexpected if these countries, which have high rate of poverty, grave social, economic, health issues, no steady growth of GDP or any other real development, will not be able to pay back. The outcome of this economic problem can be solved in political language if all of these African debt-countries become political allies of China. That is why, building railway roads, companies and factories, giving energy and providing with technology may be paid back by political loyalty. This is just a subjective assessment and judgement,

however still it does not stand far from political reality that may come soon.

Historically Africa has never been under real interest of any major state or Empire unless it was for obtaining natural resources and labour force like in case of the British Empire. The U.S. has no clear interests in Africa and its trade with Africa is not even compatible to Chinese one.

Still, when the effects of Chinese presence will become stronger and more vivid, the interests of the U.S. and especially under new administration will have to answer and grow in logical and appropriate way.

### **The Sino-American Historical Timeline**

After providing with data, it would be adequate to bring the U.S. as an important actor in overall analysis and in relations with China. The relations of the U.S. and China have never been static or constant. It had its ups and downs, happy times and close points to conflicts.

As Council on Foreign Relations (2021) suggests, historically, the first clash between American and Chinese interests can be traced back to the First Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954 when PRC got control over the Yijangshan Islands and made Taiwan leave Tachen Islands to them as well which accordingly had American navy presence. Soon in 1955 the U.S. threatened on using nuclear attack as a response after which China agreed on negotiation but still the conflict was not finished and had continuation in 1956 as well as in 1996.

Another point between Americans and Chinese was crossed in 1971 with so-called Ping-Pong Diplomacy when American journalists became the first Americans who entered PRC as ping-pong team. An interesting event was followed in the same year when Kissinger visited China secretly and it later resulted in PRC's permanent seat in UNSC replacing Taiwan.

Later, President Nixon visited Mao Zedong in China in 1972 and signed Shanghai Communiqué with Premier Zhou Enlai on normalization of relations and getting a guarantee from China not to become a new hegemon in the region. President Carter recognized One China however the U.S. still managed to revive its good terms with Taiwan but still purchased correct diplomacy with PRC.

The administration of Reagan brought new changes in the U.S.-China relations. In order to defeat the Soviet Union as soon and as effectively as possible, Reagan chose to make better friends with China even allowing PRC to the U.S. military equipment access after his visit in China in 1984.

After two decades of no significant change between the two, in late 2000 the U.S.-China Relations Act was signed by President Clinton which would better the trade relations and boost China's membership of the WTO. It became one of the core factors how and why China became the U.S.'s biggest trading partner after Canada and trade between the two rose to more than \$200 billion just in two decades (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

This is why it may be considered that the U.S. is one of the reasons of the economic rise of China. If not the U.S. and its favorable trade policy with PRC, China could be lagging back for several years, but its trade with the largest global economy brought positive fruits.

This same economic rise and prosperity brought the recognition by the U.S. as China being emerging power. As being referred as "responsible stakeholder" back in 2005, the U.S. advised China to use its rising influence over its neighbors such as North Korea as well as African counterparts like Sudan and as it is visible, China is following American advice – it has allocated \$6.5 billion to Sudan and had been largest trade partner to North Korea (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Accordingly, when a country rises in economy, it starts to spend more on military. That is why in 2007 China spent more than \$45 billion on

defense and it as predicted, it concerned the U.S. Back in 2007, Vice President Cheney expressed worries and questioned whether the rise of China was peaceful at all (Bohan, 2007).

### **Current Trends – “Chinization” and American Efforts**

To put the 20<sup>th</sup> century in one shape, as Council on Foreign Affairs (2021) suggests, China became the second largest economy surpassing Japan and having value of \$1.33 trillion just in second quarter in 2010. Deficit with the U.S. rose near to \$300 billion and caused worries not only by the U.S. but in EU and Japan as well.

In 2013 Xi Jinping became the president of China which quite soon would bring new “surprises” to the world and the U.S. The same year, Xi announced about the Belt and Road Initiative at Astana conference which proposed a global program with funding of over trillion dollars for constructing Chinese railways, roads, electronic and technological systems. The fact that more than 60 states already expressed their content including European ones is alarming for the U.S., as their trade value could be less when China puts its plan into action. The grand plan of reviving the Ancient Silk Road can be similar to “Chinese globalization” or Neo-Colonisation which ideologically rivals American principle of spreading peace and democracy.

To remember, when Obama visited the Far East back in 2011, his tour did not envision China; again the Trade Partnership treaty with eleven states did not mention China anywhere. This ignorance could have acted as “psychological” determinant for China to adopt more aggressive economic policies and orientations. Still, Sunnylands Summit in 2013 between the two leaders created more or less even formally peaceful background for cooperation on issues like climate change, regional and global concerns and North Korea. Just after two years the

U.S. condemned China's ambitions and actions in the South China Sea and creation of Chinese islands for military means and interests (Council on Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The recent development of relations between the U.S. and China is being witnessed, discussed and debated. Under President Trump, much of scenario changed. The President neglected already traditional aspect of the U.S. foreign policy and tried to have closer ties with Taiwan. The two leaders of the U.S. and PRC had a meeting where trade and North Korea were on discussion table, however, the relations still worsened.

Tariffs which wholly were worth of more than \$50 billion were imposed by the U.S. against China in 2018. 25% import tax was followed in several months on nearly every goods starting with food like meat and soybean ending with technological goods like televisions and mobile phones and medical services (Council on Foreign Affairs, 2021).

In response to \$200 billion worth of tariffs against Chinese goods, China behaved in similar way and increased tariffs against the U.S. worth of \$60 billion. Chinese companies, especially Huawei were under biggest threat and danger in the U.S. as their price had to be cut off and it was unclear whether the government would shut their companies' door one day (Council on Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The Trade War can be said to be one of the most negative moments if not the escalation of the U.S.-China relations. It may also be regarded as the phase of a Cold War between the two great powers.

### **China's Real Power – China under the Umbrella of 4Ps**

While judging the U.S. policies and attitude towards China throughout history, China can be assessed and put under 4Ps for more concrete evaluations. According to Jentleson (2014), national interests of the U.S. can be dissected into

four categories: Power, Peace, Prosperity and Principles; therefore they can be used as guidelines or features to better understand and analyze foreign policy of the U.S. The first fundamental component is Power in which China is leading with soft power but also tries to balance with hard power. To mention once again, in 2011 China became second largest economy after the U.S. and surpassed Japan. China became the largest trade partner of the U.S. replacing Brazil and its trade with Africa in whole increased for more than 500% since 2001.

In case of military spending, China gradually increases defence spending and has the second largest military globally after the U.S. surpassing Russia. In 2019 China claimed to have defence spending worth \$178 billion, but the actual spending according to Tian and Su (2021) was far more – over \$240 billion just in 2019.

China continues its aggressive behaviour in South China Sea and still works on construction of artificial islands. China possesses nuclear weapons and has modernized ammunitions and technology. The Eastern Asian region or Asian region undoubtedly saw the rise of China and now the whole world is feeling its global influence and presence.

In case of Peace, China has improved its relations with Russia, after hostile Sino-Soviet relations and tries to have friendly terms with another global power – India. China has indubitably positive relations with African and Latin states' leaders as well as from Central Asia, Arabic Peninsula and South-East Asia. China has plan of over \$8 trillion in the BRI project in four continents. Also, via building economic statecraft, China tries to reconnect with Chinese diaspora and spreads educational programs with funding to study and get education in China (Stromseth, 2019). In addition, China builds connections with the EU via Belt and Road Initiative and is the member of over eighty international organizations. PRC is the

second largest UN peacekeeper funder worldwide. China is actively engaged in UN Mission in Liberia, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire; is observer in G24, Arctic Council and Latin American Integration Association.

Still, when it comes to Principles, China has serious problems. The Uyghur issue is not a secret anymore. Much of international society is concerned about the situation of Uyghur people in China who are kept in camps and are under severe human rights issues. Referred as educational and training centers by Chinese government, the type of "education" given to this Muslim group of people is very much debated. Leaked information from the camps stressed on extremely harsh conditions, brainwashing and abuse of Uyghurs by Chinese government. Sometimes it is even referred as Uyghur genocide, however, unless something grave and radically serious happens, there is no chance of adequate interference in this matter.

Even if Uyghur issue is not highlighted, one still should remember that it is China, People's Republic of China, with strong Communist ideology and system and the world and especially international relations knows much about methods and tactics played and used by Communist regimes inside and outside.

## Conclusion

In all, even if the U.S. analyzed that China posed a foreign policy threat back in 1945, their actions and measures were not constant or enough. Eisenhower would threaten, Nixon would deter and engage, Carter would acknowledge, Obama would ignore and then re-approach, Trump would spoil.

Policies had been different throughout time, but the fact was one – China was rising, and it was rising tremendously, at high rate and speed and gaining more power, hunger and ambitions. China still has much to show, declare and manifest and the consequent reaction and actions from the U.S. have to be followed in any case. The Sino-American interests may cross in Latin America, Africa, or even in the heartland of Europe. The concrete dates and events cannot be predicted however the pre-analysis and preparation for deadlocks have to be calculated by the U.S. at any cost.

As it has been witnessed through history, and as it is ideologically known and understood there cannot be two suns in the sky, but still everyone wants their place under the sun.

Perhaps the world is living in a new Sino-American Cold War which may be retold and reanalyzed after several years. Chinese leadership in face of its President Xi already congratulated the newly elected President Biden; the only thing to see is now whether this congratulation will meet warm salute from another side and how the celebration party will be developed.

## References

Bohan C. (2007). Cheney raises concerns about China, North Korea, Reuters. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cheney-idUSSYD1933820070223>

Chatzky, A., McBride, J. (2020). China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative, Council on Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

China Africa Research Initiative, (2021). Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, data Retrieved from: <http://www.sais-cari.org/data>

Council on Foreign Affairs, U.S. Relations with China, Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

Graham, A. (2015). The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War? The Atlantic, Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

Jentleson, B. W. (2014). American Foreign Policy, fifth edition, Duke University, pp.419-427, 430-431, Retrieved from: [https://bawar.net/data0/books/59f233aabdeb4/pdf/American%20Foreign%20Policy%20-%20Jentleson,%20Bruce%20W.%20\[SRG\].pdf](https://bawar.net/data0/books/59f233aabdeb4/pdf/American%20Foreign%20Policy%20-%20Jentleson,%20Bruce%20W.%20[SRG].pdf)

Stromseth, J. (2019). THE TESTING GROUND: CHINA'S RISING INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND REGIONAL RESPONSES, The Brookings Institution, Retrieved from: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FP\\_20191119\\_china\\_se\\_asia\\_stromseth.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FP_20191119_china_se_asia_stromseth.pdf)

Tian Nan, Su Fei, (2021), A New Estimate of China's Military Expenditure, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Retrieved from: [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/2101\\_sipri\\_report\\_a\\_new\\_estimate\\_of\\_chinas\\_military\\_expenditure.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/2101_sipri_report_a_new_estimate_of_chinas_military_expenditure.pdf)

Vox, (2018). China's trillion-dollar plan to dominate global trade, Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvXROXilpvQ>

Ying, Sh. (2016). South China Sea: How We Got to This Stage, published on The National Interest, Retrieved from: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/south-china-sea-how-we-got-stage-16118>

Zakaria, F. (2020). The New China Scare, Why America Shouldn't Panic About Its Latest Challenger, Foreign Affairs Magazine. Retrieved from: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-12-06/new-china-scare>

Zhang P. (2019). Belt and Road in Latin America: A regional game changer? Atlantic Council. Retrieved from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/belt-and-road-in-latin-america-a-regional-game-changer/>