

# China-US Relations: Will The Conflict Escalation Cause A “New Cold War”

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## Abstract

China-US relations are currently facing the most serious situation since diplomatic relations were first established between the two countries. As one of the most important bilateral relations in the modern world, China-US relations significantly impact the development of the global political and economic landscape in a variety of different ways. Disagreements between China and the United States in terms of ideology and national power are not only the causes of conflict intensification between the two nations, and other factors are mentioned in this paper.

## Keywords

International relations, China, United States, new Cold War.

## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the political and economic pattern of East Asia has experienced some quite drastic changes as a direct result of the rapid rise of China. As a newly emerged growth point in the world economy, the re-establishment of the cooperative relationship between China and its neighboring countries has profoundly affected and altered the geopolitical, economic, and security ecology of East Asia. In addition to the influence and voice China has in the Asia-Pacific region becoming further enhanced, the US government has readjusted and rebalanced the strategy of the Asia-Pacific region. The implementation of this “return to the Asia-Pacific” strategy threatens the peripheral security environment of China, with ASEAN as the representative of the neighboring countries. Relations between the US and China have started to deteriorate and conflict between the two nations has escalated.

## 2. Organization of the Text

During the first term of Barack Obama in office, the US government adopted a “win-win respect, comprehensive cooperation” policy toward US-China relations (in 2013, during the meeting between President Xi Jinping and Obama, the construction of new US-China relations with non-conflict and non-confrontation, mutual respect, cooperation and win-win cooperation was proposed). However, since 2010, a series of diplomatic conflicts, including the Taiwan issue and the Diaoyu Islands issue, the Obama administration realized that the influence and status of China in the Asia-Pacific region were both increasing, and US policy toward China started to become tougher [1].

According to some US scholars, the development of US-China relations has a tendency to be more of a zero-sum game. For example, Aaron Friedberg, a professor at Princeton University and foreign policy advisor to former Vice President Dick Cheney, emphasized that “in the face of China’s growing strength and ambition, the United States must get tough on China in many areas where U.S.-China interests are at odds” [2].

Graham Allison, the founding dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard University and former Assistant Secretary of Defense of the United States of America, proposed the term “Thucydides’ Trap” [3], suggesting that history is repeating itself, and that rising powers are bound to have a structural impact on this as they inevitably exert structural pressure on the existing world order and cause conflict with the old ones. This has happened a total of 16 times in the last 500 years: 12 times it has resulted in wars, and four times it has ended in the ceding of hegemony by the dominant power, or the peaceful coexistence of the rising power and the old power. He argued that it is a quite common historical phenomenon that the vast majority of cases end in non-peaceful means [4]. He sees the growing national power of China as being a “threat” to the United States, arguing that the current US-China relationship can best be explained through the lens of the Thucydides’ Trap.

In an interview with NBC Business, the former Prime Minister of Australia and founding director of the Asia Society Policy Institute Kevin Rudd said, “The US and China are engaged in an ‘undeclared new technological Cold War’, especially a cold war in information technology.” In an interview with the Financial Times, he went on to say that “China and the United States are not yet on the brink of a Cold War, but friction between the US and China could be even more damaging than the Cold War” [5]. At the July 2018 Aspen Security Forum, the former deputy assistant director of the CIA’s East Asia Mission Center Michael Collins, said that China is waging a “quiet kind of Cold War” against the United States that is a “redefined Cold War”, as opposed to the US-Soviet Cold War [6].

The “new Cold War” is different from the “parallel market” of the United States and the Soviet Union during the original Cold War (this was a confrontation between the two camps of the United States and the Soviet Union on all fronts: political, economic, military, and ideological), and the political, economic, and humanistic ties between China and the United States are ubiquitous. At the moment, the so-called “socialist camp” and “capitalist camp” are no more at odds with each other than they were during the time of the original Cold War, and a Gallup poll that was released in May 2019 showed that approximately 43 percent of respondents believed that “socialism is a good thing”, an 18 percent increase in support compared to the findings of a similar 1942 Roper/Fortune poll [7]. The gradual rise of the Democratic Socialist Party of America (DSA) has resulted in socialism no longer being considered a taboo term in the American political landscape [8].

What scholars are describing as the “new Cold War” is mainly manifested in the two fields of economic trade and information technology. For example, on March 22nd, 2018, the Trump administration decided that it would launch a trade war due to “China’s theft of US intellectual property rights and trade secrets”, escalating the situation by imposing an additional \$60 billion in tariffs on China. The Trump administration’s “Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2020” announced a ban on the use of so-called “threats to US national security” by manufacturers of communications equipment, including Huawei. On May 15th the same year, the US Department of Commerce announced that they were imposing a total embargo on the purchasing of chips by Huawei using US-developed technology.

As Hugh White, a professor at the National Australian University, asked regarding the rising international stature of China in his 2012 book, *China’s Choice: Why the United States Wants to Share Power*, In the face of China’s rising international stature, “Is it possible for China and the United States to make a grand bargain?” The author argued that the United States may have just three choices: the first would be to resist the rise of China and attempt to maintain the status quo in the Asia-Pacific; the second would be for the United States to withdraw completely from absolute dominance in Asia, recognizing and allowing China to establish a dominant position in Asia; and the third would be to allow China to play a greater role while the United States maintains its existing position in the new power situation. Any attempt by either side to compete for dominance would lead to a protracted and rigorous confrontation, with both sides

taking quite significant risks that could result in heavy losses. Therefore, White argued that a consensus needs to be reached before the US should fully reveal its “declining power” and China must still be willing to seek cooperation [9].

### 3. Conclusion

The modern world today is facing a great change, the likes of which have not been seen in a hundred years, with traditional and non-traditional international security issues occurring with increasing regularity, and terrorism, financial crises, and climate change all posing a significant threat to the development of human society. No country can be alone in such an increasingly volatile international situation, and as two of the most important and influential players in the landscape of the modern world, the trend of the development of relations between China and the United States will continue to have a long and lasting impact on the political and economic landscape of the world in the future. The relationship between the two nations will also have a significant impact on the issues of peace, development, and the overall security of mankind in the future.

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