**A framework for U.S. Policy toward China**

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<https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-framework-for-u-s-policy-toward-china-2/>

There are three broad options for the United States to respond to the China challenge. All have their prominent advocates in the current policy literature:

* Accommodation.

Its proponents see the rise in Chinese influence, particularly in the Western Pacific, as inevitable, producing a China that is the region’s center of gravity, an inevitable outcome that they say the United States should accept. Some who advocate this view believe Chinese ambitions are considerable but limited—national unification including Taiwan and the land features and associated waters of the South China Sea; a diminished role for U.S. alliances; and reduction in U.S. basing, patrols, and military presence in the Western Pacific. In their eyes, U.S. resistance to these ambitions will prove fruitless but will feed China’s hostility and ambitions. They contend that the United States will need to make hard choices among its global and domestic priorities and that maintaining military preeminence in the Western Pacific should be abandoned.

* Containment, confrontation, or untrammeled strategic rivalry.

This school argues that China’s ambition is to dominate the Western Pacific and its periphery. It aims to expel the United States from the region, or at least marginalize the U.S. military, attenuate or destroy U.S. alliances, and bring the other countries of the region into submissiveness to Chinese preferences and interests. It believes that U.S. and Chinese interests regionally, and perhaps globally, are fundamentally incompatible, and we should acknowledge this if we are to adopt a coherent strategy. Usually, but not always, advocates of this approach emphasize the dominant role of the Chinese Communist Party, internal repressiveness, and clashing values with the United States. They point to China’s rapid expansion of its military capabilities and foresee a day before long when they will be used to achieve its nationalist goals, either through military force or intimidation. Therefore, they call for the United States to marshal its political, military, and economic tools to prevent China from becoming the preeminent regional power and to maintain U.S. regional dominance.

* Global cooperation, regional resolve.

People in this camp believe that there are elements in approaches 1 and 2 that are sound but that aggressive and exclusive pursuit of either option is neither required nor desirable. In the eyes of advocates of option 3, the accommodation option would accept a second class status for the United States in the region by choice, not necessity. The untrammeled rivalry option would deprive us of the benefits of a constructive relationship while locking in a destructive competition that would fail to enhance our security. Supporters of option 3 believe that the relationship with China cannot, and should not, be reduced to one of pure rivalry, nor should we overlook the very real strategic differences in the Western Pacific between us.

**5 Questions That Every Presidential Candidate Should Answer on China**

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Director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, August 6, 2016

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* How should the US respond to China’s island building in the South China Sea?

China continues to build man-made “islands” in the South China Sea’s contested waters. Previously submerged reefs now feature airfields, ports, and military installations. With island military facilities and an increasingly menacing navy, China can project power, coerce its neighbors, and try to control vital trade lanes. Additionally, China’s attempt to claim territorial waters around these “islands” threatens freedom of navigation, the bedrock of the international system.

Any effective US strategy in the region must involve active diplomacy backed up by hard power. The United States needs to coordinate with Southeast Asian claimants to negotiate a political solution for territorial and resources disputes in the South China Sea. This initiative should engage China, but if Beijing is obstinate, the parties should work around it toward a solution. While negotiations develop, the US must continue freedom of navigation exercises, surveillance missions, and robust partner military capacity building. The bottom line, however, is that the US lacks a permanent military presence in Southeast Asia – something that could be remedied by a shipbuilding program to permanently place a sufficient number of ships in the PACOM theater.

* How should the US protect itself from Chinese cyber espionage?

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and Chinese cyber-militias have become highly effective at penetrating the networks of US defense contractors, businesses, and government offices. From the stolen designs of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, to the massive data breach at the Office of Personnel and Management, Chinese cyber-warriors continue to undermine US national security with impunity. The US must confront the Chinese about their persistent cyber intrusions. The US must deter China by readying itself to inflict greater damage to Chinese networks and systems than is worth the price for Beijing of an attack.

* Will you make good on the US promise in 2001 to help Taiwan acquire submarines?

Over the past 20 years, the cross-Strait military balance has shifted drastically in favor of the PRC as the PLA has developed a suite of modern military technologies. In 2001, President Bush agreed to sell Taiwan eight diesel electric submarines to increase the ROC’s deterrent capabilities, however, both the Bush and Obama administrations have failed to follow through on delivering the submarines.

In accordance with the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the US has a responsibility to “make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.” Facing over 1,100 PRC short-range ballistic missiles and 60 modern PLAN submarines, Taiwan needs a survivable deterrent platform, a conclusion reached over a decade ago by US and Taiwanese defense and policy officials.

* Will you support freedom and internal reform in China?

Any comprehensive China policy must address not only China’s growing military and economic clout overseas, but also its internal repression. For decades, the Chinese Communist Party has succeeded in maintaining one-party, authoritarian rule by crushing domestic Chinese reformers, protestors and calls for liberalization. The CCP’s oppressive practices deserve a response—a sophisticated defense of freedom. A free and democratic China would not only tame the increasingly dangerous Sino-American strategic rivalry but also unleash the Chinese people’s potential for innovation, commerce, and creativity. To this end, the US should pursue an evolutionary, not revolutionary, strategy of engaging with China’s suppressed class of latent democrats: the human rights lawyers, Christians, and political dissidents who campaign for freedom and liberty. The US should add a “freedom prong” to its multifaceted strategy of engaging China will balance against its growing power.

* What is your vision of a political and economic security order in Asia that is consistent with our interests and principles? Does it include the TPP? A defensive coalition of allies and partners? An India-Australia-Japan-US quadrilateral security agreement?

The US-led world order has paved the way for dynamic economic growth and great power peace in Asia since the end of WWII. The US military has defended allies, projected power forward into Asia, and ensured freedom of navigation and maritime trade. No nation has benefited more from the existing international system than China.

Now, however, the existing order is being strained as the PRC seeks to revise aspects of the international system it deems threatening. Most notably, China aims to replace the United States as the predominant security player in the region. The US must avoid policies that simply react to China’s provocations. Instead it must seek to further develop an Asia peaceful free and prosperous through economic leadership to create more free market economies, building up a defense coalition of allies and partners who share common interest and a high level diplomatic leadership vehicle such as a quadrilateral among Delhi, Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington. An organization of this kind can reassure smaller countries that China will dominate Asia and better engage China on issues of common concern.