

ICAS Bulletin

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A Bimonthly Survey of Research and Analysis on China-US Relations

Twice a month, the ICAS Bulletin updates a global audience on American perspectives regarding the world's most important bilateral relationship. Research papers, journal articles, and other prominent work published in the US are listed here alongside information about events at US-based institutions. To receive the ICAS bulletin via email, please notify us at icas@chinaus-icas.org.

Featured Publication

Perception and Misperception in American and Chinese Views of the Other

Alastair Iain Johnston and Mingming Shen, eds.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 22, 2015

Carnegie and the China Strategic Culture Promotion Association commissioned this series of studies to more deeply analyze their 2012 opinion polling in the US and China on their respective views of the other. The result is four reports from multiple authors. The first study finds that on the aggregate Chinese perceive Americans as generally displaying negative traits and have a more positive view of their Chinese compatriots. However, the author finds that these attitudes don't necessarily translate into denigration of the American people. The second study finds that 25% of Chinese respondents believe that China should not take on a leadership role in the world, and a further 42% believe that it should share global leadership with the United States. Moreover, these attitudes toward Chinese leadership are associated with higher levels of education. The third study takes on the sources of mistrust between the two countries. American mistrust of China seems to originate in ideological differences: they trust other democratic nations more. The study contends that Chinese mistrust of the United States originates in educational socialization and media messaging. The authors find that the Chinese educational system in general has a negative influence on trust of the outside world. A final study assesses the impact of Tea Party politics on the US. It finds that while Tea Party conservatives are suspicious of China and prefer more hardline policies, they also exhibit less interest than other factions in American politics for interfering with China's domestic political processes.

Publications

Congress and Asia-Pacific Policy: Dysfunction and Neglect

Aaron Connelly

Lowy Institute, September 2015

Connelly lists the ways in which political dysfunction within the US Congress has hampered America's ability to conduct foreign policy. While recent trends have made all policymaking more difficult, the author contends that policy towards the Asia-Pacific is especially affected because, unlike with other regions like the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific has few powerful legislators who take an interest in the region. Connelly discusses a number of dynamics that have made Congress less effective over the last several years, many of which derive from an increasingly partisan atmosphere. These combine with a loss of foreign affairs expertise on Capitol Hill: many senior legislators have left recently, resulting in key committee positions filled by junior members. Moreover, the balance of power between congressional committees has recently tilted away from foreign affairs committees and towards appropriations. As a result, the US government hasn't been able to adequately implement or even communicate about.

New Realities in the US-China Relationship

Paul Haenle and Anne Sherman

Op-Ed, Carnegie-Tsinghua Center, September 10, 2015

Haenle and Sherman discuss how the diplomatic challenges presented by China have changed recently, and assess common American approaches to the relationship. They note that the global scale of US and Chinese policies has amplified differences between the two states and China has become more assertive, apparently abandoning the "hide and abide" strategy of the past. Moreover, China's rejuvenation has taken on a character that many in the US had not expected. The American business community, once an "anchor of stability" in the relationship, is now at the center of many US complaints about Chinese activities, from cyber-espionage to protectionist policies. The authors assess a policy dichotomy of "preponderance" vs "reassurance" and find that both extremes of the US policy debate are flawed.

Chinese State Visits are Always Hard: a historical perspective

Jeffrey Bader

Order from Chaos blog, Brookings, September 17, 2015

Bader seeks to place the Xi Jinping visit in some much needed context. While many consider the visit to come at a uniquely perilous time for the relationship, or even at a "tipping point," Bader points out that Xi's predecessors have all made visits that required dealing with thorny issues. In part this is because leaders from the two countries have often arranged visits at difficult times, and also the US and China tend to have different expectations about what to expect from a high level summit.

China Has a Plan to Take Over Central Asia and America Loves It

John Hudson

Foreign Policy, September 18, 2015

Hudson describes how China's pursuit of its "One Belt One Road" initiative has been welcomed by US officials concerned with stability in Central Asia. As the US plans to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2016, its own economic plan for the region, the New Silk Road Initiative, has not been implemented in any significant way. China has recently been engaged in both development and diplomatic initiatives that achieve many of the goals NSRI had sought. Because of its own concerns with stability and economic development in Xinjiang, China has not only engaged in infrastructure development in Central Asia and Pakistan, but has become more engaged diplomatically in working towards a political settlement for Afghanistan. These developments, according to Hudson, serve American interests of stability and a counterbalance to Russian influence in the region.

Xi Jinping's Message to America

A ChinaFile Conversation, September 22, 2015

Taisu Zhang, Graham Webster, Orville Schell and David Shambaugh assess Xi Jinping's September 22 speech in Seattle.

US-China Climate Announcements Lay Foundation for Success in Paris

Melanie Hart, Pete Ogden, Greg Dotson

Center for American Progress, September 25, 2015

The authors assess Friday's announcement from Presidents Xi and Obama regarding new commitments to battling climate change. According to the authors, the promised measures suggest that both leaders are genuinely interested in taking steps toward meeting the carbon reduction targets agreed upon in November 2014.

To Hack or Not to Hack?

Richard Bejtlich

Brookings Up Front, September 28, 2015

Bejtlich examines the recent agreement between Xi Jinping and Barack Obama regarding cyber issues. He takes the agreement to be at best productive, and at worst, meaningless. Bejtlich describes four different scenarios that describe the motivation behind Xi Jinping's agreement to a ban on government espionage for commercial gain: that Xi interprets this language in such a way that China is already in compliance (for example, by separating PLA activities from "government" activities); that China will match the US practice of refusing to share information gathered in espionage activities with private sector entities that could stand to benefit from it; that China intends to switch to different methods of data acquisition; that China intends to develop strategic emerging industries through mergers and acquisitions. In the last case, commitment to a cyber code of conduct will make it easier for Chinese companies to secure approval from the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US.

Events at US-based Institutions

Hearing: Maritime Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region

United States Senate Armed Services Committee, September 17, 2015

Assistant Secretary of Defense David Shear and PACOM commander Admiral Harry Harris discussed freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, among other issues. Senator John McCain urged the Pentagon to “think anew” about deterrence with regard to the US-China relationship, and pressed both Shear and Harris to expand US Navy freedom of navigation exercises to sailing within 12 nautical miles of features China has reclaimed in the South China Sea. Harris reiterated his assessment that North Korea is the greatest threat the US faces in the Pacific, and urged the Senate to ratify UNCLOS.

US-China Relations in Historical Context

Brookings, September 21, 2015

Historians Warren Cohen, Mark Elliott, and William Kirby discussed the character of US-China relations over the past century and a half. Elliott discussed the meaning of China’s “rejuvenation” in a historical context, suggesting that it was a return to what the Chinese consider a normal state of affairs—great power status. Kirby described the significant influence that American institutions have had on the formation of educational institutions in China, particularly in the pre-WWII era.

Asian Architecture Conference

CSIS, September 22, 2015

This day-long conference featured panels on the economic issues that will be dealt with at the upcoming APEC summit, the role of small businesses in developing Asia’s economy, and security challenges facing the East Asia Summit. The event also featured keynote addresses from former White House official Evan Medeiros and the US Trade Representative Michael Froman.

Commentary

The Problem with America's China Engagement Policy

By Jiao Shixin

How to deal with a rising China has become America's primary strategic issue since the 2008 financial crisis. In many American scholars' views, with its emergence as the world's second largest economy, China is becoming more and more assertive, and becoming more and more aggressive in the maritime territorial dispute with its neighbors. Most importantly, the US is very concerned that a rising China will take actions to challenge and replace its leadership in East Asia. All of this has triggered significant debate regarding China policy in the US. Many leading scholars and think tanks believe that the current strategy of cooperation has not achieved America's strategic objectives—in short, that the engagement strategy has failed. Some American Scholars think that the domestic consensus on engagement has fallen apart, and some have suggested that U.S should adopt a tougher policy toward China.

Yet if we think the engagement strategy has indeed failed, it is really because the US has been pursuing the wrong goals and with the wrong intentions. The cooperation relationship with China isn't wrong itself, and the collaborative relationship has brought huge strategic benefits to United States. This policy of cooperation should not be reconsidered. Rather, it is America's goals and intentions that need adjustment.

What does Sino-US cooperation bring to the world and to the US? It brings peace and prosperity, with the US benefitting the most. The policy of reform and opening up pushed China's integration into the international system, which was an important condition for the expansion of US power in the post-Cold War era. Without strategic cooperation with China, it would have been difficult for the United States to increase its global influence throughout that period, and America's leadership would not have become so established globally. The pursuit of cooperation under the engagement strategy is very helpful to America's strategic interests. It promotes the global expansion of the United States in such a way that "globalization" has become "Americanization." This has been a foundation of long-term economic growth in U.S in the Post-Cold war. If it is necessary for U.S to adjust the engagement strategy, what should be changed is not the policy of cooperation, but using cooperation as a means toward the strategic end of maintaining hegemony.

The strategic goal or intention behind the engagement strategy has been to shape China by bringing it into an international system and international order that is dominated by the US, and then pressure China to conform to America's vision for it.

Essentially, this is a huge and impractical goal. The strategic objectives of the United States with regard to China have two aspects: the first is to establish American-style democracy in China—to change China from the inside; the second is to bring China into the post-WWII international system that was constructed by the US—to tame China from the outside to conform to the strategic interests of the United States. In reality, the two objectives are very difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

In the case of the first US goal, different cultures have different democratic systems: China and the United States have different civilizations and political cultures, which means that between China and the United States, the same democratic notions are bound to produce different forms of institutions. American democracy is not suitable for China's national conditions, and it is impossible to establish in China. It is clearly not feasible to make China's democratization an objective of the engagement strategy.

With regard to the second US goal, incorporating China into the international system that the United States established and using liberal norms to assimilate China into an international rules-based order will not cause China to relinquish its sovereignty and independence. Nor do they mean that China's interests will be subordinated to the US under the common international rules. In fact, China is learning how to use international law to safeguard its national interests, and has a long history of opposing inequality in international relations. As China rises, its pursuit of a more equitable international political and economic order will only grow stronger. It is simply not feasible to use international standards to ensure China's compliance with America's strategic interests. China's diplomatic behavior will grow increasingly in line with the common interests of international community, not just America's.

All in all, the US engagement strategy has been motivated by two impossible goals. It is revealing that even when the United States makes significant other gains by cooperating with China, many American scholars are nonetheless disappointed by the engagement strategy. Ultimately this is because they judge the success or failure of engagement by reference to its unrealistic and impractical strategic intentions.

How should the United States adjust its China policy? Some American scholars have suggested that US take tougher policy toward China, either by containing or punishing China. These recommendations raise significant concerns. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the United States implemented a policy of containment and isolation for a long time, but the policy was certainly a failure. The United States had to return to the strategic orbit of cooperation with China in the Nixon era. Today, China is very different than it was then. It is broadly integrated with the rest of the world, and has become the world's second largest economy. The gap in relative power between China and the United States continues to narrow and China and the United States have established relationships of mutual dependence in the economic, security and global governance domains, among others. It is very difficult for us to imagine the consequences of the US implementing strategy of containing China. The Chinese saying comes to mind, 杀敌一千，自伤八百, "sacrifice eight

hundred men in order to kill one thousand.” It should be obvious that strategies of containing or acting tough on China lack sense, and would lead the US into the dead-end of power politics.

Since the cold-war thinking of containment is not feasible, how should U.S adjust its strategy of engagement with China? The first adjustment should be to abandon its unreasonable strategic objectives and build a China strategy on the basis of equality. China is very different from the United States, China has its own historical and national conditions, and its own political genetic makeup. Policymakers in the United States should realize that the engagement strategy is incapable of altering China’s path of developing its own model of socialism. The United States should not expect to transform China through “peaceful evolution.” Even if China somehow adopted American-style democracy, it would not behave according to America’s will. Russia introduced Western democracy after the cold war, but what happened? Russia’s experience with democracy has not improved its relations with the US, and it doesn’t conform to America’s strategic vision. The United States should not assume that the “peaceful evolution” of countries towards an American model will ensure alignment with its interests.

The second adjustment is that American needs embrace the concept of “harmony without sameness.” This idea can be found in traditional Chinese thought. It means even when there are differences between people, they can still enjoy peace, harmony and cooperation. China and the United States have very different histories, political systems and paths of development. These are not a reasons for them to clash with one another, but can be reasons for establishing mutual respect, exchange and a complementary relationship. Unfortunately, the logic of the US engagement strategy is precisely opposed to this thinking. Nonetheless, we are pleased to see that some of America’s friends have accepted the Chinese way of thinking on such matters. On September 17, President Xi Jinping had a meeting with some American business representatives and former officials in Beijing. They agreed that China and US should establish “harmony without uniformity,” and should build cooperative relations. If the United States adjusts its strategy towards this direction, then engagement with China will update to Version 2.0. This revised principle of engagement should not only be the mantra for US-China relations, but also for the entire world.

Third, the United States should be wary of the temptations of “global leadership” or hegemony. World politics is changing, all kinds of global issues and challenges will continue to arise that no single country can cope with alone. The world must work together to deal with global governance. This is a truth that United States also understands. In an increasingly interdependent world, leadership in global governance also means assuming greater responsibility, which is different from traditional hegemonic leadership. Unfortunately, the United States’ current engagement strategy is still to defend the international order with a view to maintaining America’s leadership. Assessed by this criteria, the strategy has been considered by many scholars to have failed already. If the United States still cannot

resist the temptation of hegemony, and cannot, together with China and other big countries, assume the responsibilities and obligations of global governance the engagement strategy will not have a successful future, and it will be difficult for both China and the US to build a new type of great power relations.

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