



ICAS BULLETIN

Institute for China-America Studies

A Survey of Scholarship on US-China 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.

COMMENTARY

**Alek Chance on
Trump, Clinton, and
US-China Relations**
p. 7

[Subscribe to the ICAS Bulletin](#)

[Past Issues](#)

Special Focus: Clinton, Trump and the Future of US Foreign Policy

How Hillary Clinton Became a Hawk

Mark Landler

New York Times Magazine, April 20, 2016

Calling her foreign policy "grounded in cold realism about human nature," Landler suggests that Hillary Clinton has strong interests and a lifelong commitment to security issues. He believes a major change in security policies would be in store if she were elected.

Why Hillary Clinton Wouldn't be a Foreign Policy Hawk as President

Jeremy Shapiro and Richard Sokolsky

Brookings, August 12, 2016

Instead of calling her a "hawk", the two authors suggest that Hillary Clinton has sought diplomatic solutions more often than military operations. Both authors argue that if she were elected, Clinton would view domestic issues as her priority over military interventions.

American Political Decay or Renewal? The Meaning of the 2016 Election

Francis Fukuyama

Foreign Affairs, August 2016

Fukuyama discusses the rise of populism in the 2016 election by referring to it as the response of the unsatisfied public to economic stagnation. He views the popularity of Trump and Sanders as a sign of a potential revitalization of democratic dynamics in American politics.

The Candidates and the World: Compare the Candidates

Council on Foreign Relations, 2016

This project lays out a point-by-point comparison of Clinton and Trump's position on some pressing foreign policy issues, including national defense, trade, and relations with China, Iran, Russia, and more.

Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views*New York Times*, March 26, 2016

In this interview, the most extensive given on the topic of foreign policy, Donald Trump laid out details of his foreign policy with justifications on some controversial views including ending the support for US allies in the Asia-Pacific.

Publications**Article Series: China's Future***The Washington Quarterly*, 39:3 Fall 2016

This series includes articles by David Lampton, David Shambaugh, Minxin Pei, Orville Schell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom on China's political direction and the history of the Communist Party.

Estimates of Chinese Military Spending

Anthony Cordesman, Joseph Kendall

CSIS, September 28, 2016

Cordesman analyzes Chinese defense spending and how Chinese resources shape strategy. He notes that while actual levels of Chinese military spending vary, China's economic growth has allowed it to finance extensive military modernization and improve every aspect of its conventional and asymmetric warfare capabilities, as well as nuclear capabilities.

Hong Kong Political Reform: Implications for US Policy

Richard Bush

Brookings, September 28, 2016

Bush considers the developments in Hong Kong's move towards democracy and how the US can shift its role in the process by adopting a more activist approach. While Bush recognizes that the US cannot disrupt its delicate relationship with China, the US can support protection of Hong Kong's freedoms and oppose efforts by China to rescind them.

A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the US-Taiwan Defense Relationship

Eric Gomez

Cato Institute, September, 28 2016

Gomez writes that as the Chinese military increases in power and capability, the US will face a critical juncture with its security policy towards Taiwan. He warns that changes in the US-China balance of power could make the Taiwan strait a dangerous area if the US defense commitment to Taiwan loses credibility. To avoid this, Gomez suggests three policies the US can adopt: one, increasing US defense capabilities to ensure military superiority over China; two, sustaining a minimum level of military advantage over China; or three, abandoning its commitment to use military force to protect Taiwan.

Gomez concludes that the US should consider the third option and incrementally lessen its military commitment to Taiwan in exchange for reciprocal concessions from China.

Will Kim Jong Un Exploit US and South Korean Elections?

Patrick Cronin

CNAS, September 30, 2016

Patrick Cronin argues that the status of the Korean Peninsula poses a serious threat to the US' strategic influence in the Asia Pacific. He cites the upcoming South Korean (ROK) and US elections as potential catalysts for a shift in policy on the peninsula, and warns of an "October surprise" from North Korea before the November elections in hopes of weakening the alliance. To counter North Korean aggression, the US and ROK cannot rely on sanctions as an end, but must convert its strength in the form of defense and political objectives.

Toward a Mutually Beneficial US-China Economic Relationship

Matthew Goodman, David Parker

CSIS, September 30, 2016

Goodman urges Washington policymakers to recognize the real and potential benefits that trade with a more prosperous China brings. Goodman notes that, while China's entry into the WTO disrupted the US labor markets, increased trade and investment between the US and China have raised many Chinese out of poverty and raised American living standards. However, as China turns towards mercantilist policies and faces its own slew of economic problems, the US should protect its own trade and investment in the country. To do so, Goodman suggests the US should rely on fair trade provisions, remain open to blocking inbound Chinese investments if China continues to discriminate against US investors in China, and consider targeted sanctions as a recourse to cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property.

For more on this issue, watch our discussion with Matthew Goodman in the [ICAS American Voices Initiative](#).

The Future of US-China Trade Ties

David Dollar

Brookings, October 4, 2016

Dollar makes the case against protectionist policies towards US-Chinese trade, instead suggesting a "responsible hardball" approach to ensure China reciprocally opens its markets. He notes that problems in the US-China trade relationship include asymmetry, trade surplus, uncertainty surrounding US trade policy, and slowing economic growth. To mitigate these problems, Dollar urges the next administration to consider several changes in policy, including trade adjustment assistance programs at home, restrictions on state-owned enterprise (SOE) investments from China, but also avoiding implementing higher tariffs against China that would violate World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments.

Chinese Public Sees More Powerful Role in World, Names US as Top Threat

Richard Wike and Bruce Stokes

Pew Research Center, October 4, 2016

A recent Pew Global Attitudes Survey reveals that 75% of Chinese see China as playing a more important role in world affairs than a decade ago, and 60% believe China's involvement in the global economy is a good thing. This reveals a more outward-looking approach to China's role in the world stage. On the other hand, 56% of Chinese want Beijing to focus on China's own problems, and only 22% believe the

Chinese government should help other nations. The United States is viewed by many Chinese as a source of insecurity: 77% of Chinese believe that China needs to be protected from foreign influence, and 52% believe the US is trying to prevent China from becoming an equal power.

Overconfidence in Confidence Building

David Logan

Foreign Affairs, October 6, 2016

Logan writes that China has had difficulty clarifying its intentions, keeping up political will, and establishing the institutional capacity to successfully implement confidence-building measures, even after it has reached an agreement with other countries. This implementation failure, Logan argues, can make bad situations worse by heightening suspicions of noncompliance and forming bureaucratic obstacles to problem-solving. To counter these negative effects, Logan suggest that the US and China should focus on clarifying the scope and content of confidence-building agreements. He concludes that a standard procedure for military hot lines, strengthening institutional capacity and human capital, and sharing best practices could accomplish this.

Washington Should Stop Militarizing the Pacific

Nicholas Borroz, Hunter Marston

The New York Times op-ed, October 9, 2016

Borroz and Marston argue that the US' Pivot to Asia is increasing the likelihood of a clash between China and the US. They note that the American military presence in the region has far outweighed China's since World War II, and China's military expansion is proportional to its economic growth. To avoid antagonizing China or accidentally spurring an unwanted conflict, the US needs to find a balance between supporting existing allies as opposed to creating more extensive, untenable defense agreements. This means managing security commitments and power-balancing with China through effective communication and nonmilitary connections in the region.

How China and America Can Make a Serious North Korea Deal

Amitai Etzioni

The National Interest, October 10, 2016

Etzioni argues that China is the only power that has the capacity to force North Korea to change its course, so the US must engage China in its North Korean strategy. Etzioni suggests that China needs to be offered a deal based on the principle of "differential salience", i.e., using the difference in priorities between countries to help create bargains by linking issue areas. Etzioni sees the US moving China towards a tougher North Korea policy if it links the issue with concessions in areas like reconnaissance and the planned THAAD deployment.

Events

2016 Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Forum

CSIS, October 6, 2016

Policymakers and scholars from South Korea, the US, Japan, and Europe discussed the prospects for a peaceful and cooperative Northeast Asia. In the opening remarks, Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom reaffirmed the US support to its allies in the region, saying the US remains “steadfast in our defense commitments to the Republic of Korea and Japan and to the security of the Korean peninsula.” The US is willing to work with its partners in the region and “maintain a united front” against North Korea’s provocative actions.

US Strategy in Asia: Is the Pivot Working?

Kurt Campbell and Thomas Christensen

Council on Foreign Relations, October 6, 2016

Campbell argued that domestic politics in the US has become “a key variable” in many Asia Pacific countries. While the United States’ Asia policy has become “unidimensional,” Campbell called for a “multifaceted approach” which brings US exports, services, and partners from other regions to Asia. Christensen was critical of the public diplomacy around the Pivot, but he justified the policy by saying China’s increasingly assertive policies, which “have posed more challenges for American diplomacy.” He also said the objective of the Pivot is to get China back to multilateralism and emphasis on economic cooperation with neighboring countries. Despite challenges and uncertainties, both Campbell and Christensen agreed that China’s rise should be viewed positively, as there are many areas where the two countries can work closely with each other.

The US Presidential Election & China’s Leadership Transition

Cheng Li

Chicago Council on Global Affairs, October 12, 2016

Li critiqued two common views on Xi Jinping, arguing that he is neither an ambitious strongman nor a weak leader. Li believed Xi has an “optimistic” worldview that has not been acknowledged by American policymakers. In terms of the 2016 US presidential election, Li was disappointed by that China policy was “marginally mentioned” in previous debates. Li also observed that Chinese perspectives on the elections are “quite divided.” While some happily envision Trump reducing the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific, others worry that China might “suffer greatly” if the US changes its economic and security policies too abruptly. If Clinton were elected, she is expected to continue the current China policy.

Ambassador Stape Roy on the Future of US Policy Toward Asia

J. Stapleton Roy

Wilson Center, September 29, 2016

While East Asia “remains the principal global bright spot” with the potential to “outperform the rest of the world”, Roy said the region has not gained “sustained and well-informed policy attention” during this presidential election. However, the next president should be aware of the fact that East Asia today is substantially different from it was in 2008. Roy expected that the new president will have to adjust and adapt to new challenges such as increasing military spending from the US side, growing military capabilities on the Chinese side, a potential China-Russia alliance, increasing aggression from North Korea, and growing tensions between Beijing and Taipei.

Commentary

Trump and Clinton: Unpredictability versus the Status Quo in US-China Relations

Alek Chance

Predictions abound regarding the future of US foreign policy under either a Clinton or Trump presidency. While much of the campaign's rhetoric and analysis suggests that both candidates would usher in significant changes in US policy, in reality the choice between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump is a choice between predictable continuity and fundamental unpredictability. This applies, in all likelihood, to the US-China relationship. While many may welcome the prospect of change, America, China and the rest of the world should be wary of the risks.

What would the victory of either of these candidates mean for US-China relations in the near term? Answering this question is rendered difficult by the fact that China issues have been eclipsed by talk of ISIS, Russia, and terrorism, and domestic issues greatly overshadow foreign policy to begin with. For the most part, it is Trump who invokes China: it is a currency manipulator that steals American jobs; its assertiveness in the South China Sea is proof of President Obama's weakness. Clinton's comments on China are typically more measured. In short, despite a year of bad press for Beijing regarding the South China Sea, this election has not been marked by any unusual amount of "China bashing."

Some Americans and Chinese have speculated that Clinton would introduce heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington. She is recognized to be unpopular in China for her comments on human rights issues, and is generally reputed to be a hawk. This latter charge has been propagated on the left of American politics but is now espoused by some critics on the right. Her recent speech in Cincinnati, in which she reiterated most of the tropes associated with "American exceptionalism," inspired new rounds of anxiety in this regard. Clinton is also recognized as an author of Obama's "pivot to Asia," which is regarded in many quarters in China as just the latest American attempt to hinder China's rise.

Clinton's defenders have pointed out her instinctive reliance on diplomacy in dealing with China. Moreover, the kind of interventionism she has supported in the past won't likely seem very appealing in the future, especially in the Asia-Pacific context. A glance at Clinton's preview of the pivot, a 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, hardly shows her to be a hawkish voice on China compared to many in Washington. It commits the US to a policy of engagement and highlights her and Timothy Geithner's creation of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue. During Monday's debate with Trump, Clinton passed on an opportunity to score points against China by focusing a response about cyber-attacks on Russia instead.

Some Chinese and American commentators have argued that the unknown prospects of a Trump presidency might be preferable to the continuation of an undesired status quo of "American hegemony" or confrontations with China over ideological matters. At this point, we do know enough about Trump to determine that this is a risky bet. Donald Trump has indeed shown a willingness to abandon the "bipartisan consensus" on foreign policy and discard many principles traditionally espoused by American leaders. He has stated that he doesn't like the idea of American exceptionalism, repeatedly praises authoritarian leaders and their methods, and displays ambivalence about US allies in Europe and East Asia. While Republican voters surprisingly don't seem to mind these heresies, Republican foreign policy experts have flocked to endorse Clinton.

But losing the support of the Washington foreign policy elite is not proof that Trump espouses a principled and comprehensive alternative to their views. A few brave efforts have been made to impose

some coherence upon his vacuous and contradictory pronouncements, but in truth, Trump's views on international politics are unsystematic and remain fundamentally ambiguous. His "America First" slogan might seem to imply a more isolationist or restrained foreign policy, but he also wishes to increase military capabilities and harps on the conceit that the US military is an underfunded, weak, "disaster."

What is discernible in his rhetoric is not a comprehensive critique of the status quo but a populist fixation on toughness. This appears in a few main forms in his rhetoric: military strength, strength at the bargaining table, and a willingness to say tough things. Toughness also means a denigration of diplomatic solutions and nonmilitary activities. Thus even while he commits the US to continued involvement in the Middle East, he promises Americans won't be foolish enough to get involved in "nation building" while they are there.

Trump has promised to adopt this tough posture with China. He has proposed stepping up US military activities in the South and East China Seas in response to China building what he believes are "fortresses the likes of which the world has never seen." At the bargaining table, Trump promises to use what he claims is the United States' "enormous power" over China to correct the bilateral trade imbalance and end China's alleged currency devaluation. Along the way, he suggests that American leverage is sufficient to compel China to "solve that [North Korea] problem for us." On Monday night he even suggested that he could get China to "go into" North Korea at his behest.

Donald Trump's reduction of diplomacy to zero-sum battles of will doesn't bode well for the US-China relationship, which relies greatly on nuanced and sensitive diplomacy. His preoccupation with toughness and evident lack of understanding of strategic matters would multiply risks at a time when an emerging security dilemma must be carefully managed. As such, while Hillary Clinton may represent a foreign policy status quo that irritates many Chinese and some American sensibilities, the predictable downsides to this approach are more tolerable to everyone than the risks presented by an unpredictable and combative Trump.

Alek Chance is Research Fellow and Program Coordinator at ICAS. This commentary first appeared in the South China Morning Post.



Follow ICAS on Twitter at @icasDC. Past issues of the ICAS Bulletin as well as subscription information can be found at www.chinaus-icas.org/bulletin.

We welcome commentary submissions to the ICAS Bulletin. Submissions should be approximately 1000 words and discuss a bilateral or regional policy issue affecting the US-China relationship. Please mail submissions to icas@chinaus-icas.org with "commentary submission" in the subject line. ICAS offers a small honorarium for published commentary articles.