



The ICAS Bulletin

Institute for China America Studies

A Survey of Scholarship on U.S.-China Relations

February 26, 2025

What's Going On?

New U.S. Stance Shocked Europe at Munich while China Sought to improve Ties



US Vice President JD Vance speaks during the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich, southern Germany on February 14, 2025. (Source: TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP via Getty Images)

- China launched a diplomatic outreach to European countries amid growing U.S.-EU tensions, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi meeting Olaf Scholz and advocating for China's role in Ukraine peace talks.
- On February 14, U.S. Vice-President JD Vance delivered a controversial speech at the Munich Security Conference, attacking European democracies for retreating from their values while largely ignoring Ukraine and defense issues.
- On February 14, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned at the Munich Security Conference that while China does not seek conflict with the U.S., it will "play along to the end" if Washington continues its efforts to suppress Beijing, responding to unilateral "bullying" practices.

Trump Started Peace Talk with Russia in the Absence of EU and Ukraine, China Stands by Peace



Secretary Rubio Holds a Meeting with Saudi Arabia and Russia on February 18, 2025. (Official State Department photo by Freddie Everett via Flickr)

- On February 23, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that the proposed \$500 billion U.S.-Ukraine mineral deal was no longer under consideration, but negotiations for a more balanced agreement were ongoing.
- On February 23, two Trump administration officials, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, declined to explicitly blame Russia for provoking the war in Ukraine, while Trump continued to criticize Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
- On February 18, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed Donald Trump's claim that Ukraine was responsible for Russia's invasion, calling it Russian disinformation and rejecting U.S. demands for mineral concessions.
- On February 18, U.S. President Donald Trump

- On February 14, Senate Armed Services Chair Roger Wicker criticized U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for suggesting Ukraine's pre-war borders were "unrealistic," calling it a "rookie mistake" and reaffirming his strong support for Ukraine.
- On February 14, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned in Warsaw that Europe's reliance on America's military presence cannot be assumed indefinitely, urging European nations to increase defense spending.

Associated News Sources:

- ["China aims to improve ties with EU amid transatlantic tension,"](#) VOA, February 17
- ["JD Vance attacks Europe over free speech and migration,"](#) BBC, February 15
- ["China will 'play along to the end' with U.S., its top diplomat says,"](#) Reuters, February 15
- ["Senior Republican senator 'puzzled' and 'disturbed' by Hegseth's Ukraine remarks,"](#) Politico, February 14
- ["American troops in Europe are not 'forever.' US defense chief Hegseth warns"](#) Politico, February 14

criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for objecting to U.S.-Russia peace talks excluding Kyiv, blamed Ukraine for failing to prevent the war, and pressured Zelenskyy to hold elections.

- On February 18, U.S. and Russian officials met in Saudi Arabia for Ukraine peace talks without Kyiv's participation, prompting backlash from Ukraine and European allies, while U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio suggested resolving the conflict could improve U.S.-Russia relations.
- On February 18, China welcomed U.S.-Russia peace efforts on Ukraine, emphasizing that Kyiv must eventually be included in negotiations, while Beijing positioned itself as a potential mediator amid concerns that Washington and Moscow were sidelining Ukraine and Europe.
- China proposed to mediate U.S.-Russia peace talks over Ukraine, offering to host a summit between Trump and Putin and provide peacekeeping forces. Still, the offer was met with skepticism in Washington and Europe due to Beijing's close ties with Moscow.

Associated News Sources:

- ["What to Know About the \\$500 Billion Deal Trump Wants With Ukraine,"](#) Time Magazine, February 23
- ["Two Trump officials decline to say Russia started the war in Ukraine"](#) NBC News, February 23
- ["Zelenskyy hits back at Trump's comments, says Ukraine is not for sale,"](#) NBC News, February 19
- ["Trump blames Ukraine over war with Russia, saying it could have made a deal,"](#) The Guardian, February 19
- ["Russia and US agree to work toward ending Ukraine war in a remarkable diplomatic shift,"](#) AP, February 18
- ["US and Russia to appoint teams to end Ukraine war at talks, despite Kyiv's absence"](#) South China Morning Post, February 18
- ["China Tries to Play the Role of Peacemaker in Ukraine"](#) Wall Street Journal, February 13

Tensions Mount in Taiwan Strait as U.S.-China Competition Intensifies



*F-16V exercising on February 20, 2025
(Source: Taiwan Military, Public Domain)*

- On February 18, 2025, Taiwan announced plans to restructure its marine corps by forming the 77th Brigade to enhance coastal strike capabilities with long-range precision weapons, while the 66th Brigade shifts to defending Taipei with a new drone warfare unit.
- On February 18, TSMC explored acquiring a stake in Intel's U.S. chip fabrication facilities under Trump administration guidance to bolster domestic semiconductor production, as government officials pressured Intel to address market struggles and strengthen U.S. chip-making capabilities.
- On February 18, China condemned the U.S. State Department's removal of language opposing Taiwan's independence from its fact sheet, calling it a "serious regression" and accusing Washington of encouraging separatism.
- Taiwan considered a multi-billion-dollar arms purchase from the U.S., valued between \$7 billion and \$10 billion, including coastal defense missiles and HIMARS rocket systems, signaling its commitment to strengthening defense amid rising tensions with China.
- On February 16, the U.S. State Department updated the language on Taiwan, which removed explicit opposition to Taiwan's independence; meanwhile, Taiwan reported the transit of a Canadian warship through the Taiwan Strait.

Associated News Sources:

In the Absence of active U.S. Involvement, South China Sea Tensions Remain



Marine performance test of the Type 055 Chinese Destroyer. (Source: Military Armed Forces via Flickr)

- On February 21, Chinese warships sailing south along Australia's eastern coast notified of live-fire exercises in international waters between Australia and New Zealand.
- On February 18, China opposed Vietnam's construction and land reclamation activities on the disputed Barque Canada Reef in the Spratly Islands, calling it an "illegal occupation."
- American China analysts warned that China is moving to fill the void left by the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID, and this shift could weaken U.S. global competition with China in the long run.
- On February 18, a Chinese navy helicopter flew within three meters of a Philippine patrol plane over Scarborough Shoal. While Manila condemned the maneuver as reckless and a serious safety risk, Beijing defended its actions as enforcing sovereignty over the disputed territory in the South China Sea.
- Recently, the Philippines reaffirmed its commitment to the U.S.-made Typhon missile system despite China's objections, announcing its inclusion in upcoming large-scale military exercises designed to test responses to external threats.
- On February 16, tensions flared at the Munich Security Conference as Chinese and Philippine representatives clashed over maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

["Taiwan's marine corps to rebuild brigade with modern coastal mission,"](#) *South China Morning Post*, February 19

["TSMC Eyes Intel's U.S Chip Plants in a Bold Domestic Takeover,"](#) *Yahoo Finance*, February 18

["China condemns US after line on 'Taiwan independence' cut from site,"](#) *BBC*, February 18

["Exclusive: Taiwan considering multi-billion dollar arms purchase from US, sources say,"](#) *Reuters*, February 17

["US drops website wording on not supporting Taiwan independence,"](#) *Reuters*, February 16

Former Chinese vice-foreign minister Fu Ying rejected Manila's occupation of disputed shoals, while Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo accused powerful nations of disregarding international laws.

Associated News Sources:

["Chinese Navy Drills in Tasman Sea Unnerve Australia and New Zealand,"](#) *The New York Times*, February 21

["China opposes Vietnam's building work on disputed reef in South China Sea,"](#) *VOA*, February 19

["US calls out 'dangerous' Chinese helicopter maneuvers as tensions rise over South China Sea,"](#) *CNN World*, February 19

["Chinese aircraft and Philippine plane in close encounter over Scarborough Shoal,"](#) *South China Morning Post*, February 18

["Philippines doubles down on US-made Typhon missile system despite China's warnings,"](#) *South China Morning Post*, February 18

["Beijing, Philippines spar over South China Sea claims during Munich conference,"](#) *South China Morning Post*, February 16

China Accelerates Economic Consolidation and AI Innovation Amid U.S. Pressures



Chinese Deep Seek Shaping US-China AI Competition. (Source: Tim Reckmann via Flickr)

- China's mergers and acquisitions (M&A) activity rebounded due to government stimulus measures and mounting pressure from U.S. tariffs, with larger

- In Other News -



President Donald J. Trump and First Lady Melania Trump walk down the Ground Floor Corridor in the White House, Jan. 21, 2025. (Source: Official White House Photo by Andrea Hanks via Flickr, Public Domain)

["China and US need to find a way to 'get along', Wang Yi tells American business groups,"](#) *South China Morning Post*, February 19

["In from the cold? Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma spotted](#)

domestic firms consolidating industries to enhance competitiveness, while small enterprises faced increasing challenges, and cross-border M&A remained limited.

- On February 16, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged entrepreneurs to boost innovation at a closed-door symposium, emphasizing government support for the private sector, and rising tech competition, while state media reported lawmakers were drafting China's first basic law focused on private sector development.

- On February 13, Apple selected Alibaba as its AI partner in China, bypassing other contenders like DeepSeek, Baidu, and Tencent to comply with local regulations, while analysts noted that AI services alone may not be enough for Apple to regain market share from Huawei.

- Chinese AI model DeepSeek saw rapid adoption across multiple industries, including automakers, financial firms, and telecommunications, due to its open-source availability and lower costs compared to OpenAI's ChatGPT, while Beijing increased support through subsidized computing power.

Associated News Sources:

["China deal-making ramps up after years of decline as domestic companies prepare for Trump tariffs,"](#) CNBC, February 18

["China's Xi urges entrepreneurs to 'show their talents' in sign of support for private business,"](#) CNBC, February 16

["Apple picks Alibaba to launch AI features in China,"](#) CNN, February 13

["Chinese businesses rush to try DeepSeek AI at 'unprecedented' scale,"](#) CNBC, February 12

[among top tech bosses who met China's Xi,"](#) CNN Business, February 17

["China's animated blockbuster smashed box office records at home. Now it's hitting Western cinemas,"](#) CNN, February 14

["AI giants Baidu, OpenAI offer their chatbots for free in response to DeepSeek's advance,"](#) CNN Business, February 14

["TikTok returns to Apple and Google app stores in the US,"](#) BBC, February 13

What Are We Reading? ↓

- *BBC*: ["Why is Ukraine negotiating a minerals deal with the US?"](#) by Abdujalil Abdurasulov (February 24)
- Council on Foreign Relations: ["https://www.cfr.org/article/art-ukraine-deal"](https://www.cfr.org/article/art-ukraine-deal) by Michael Froman (February 24)
- *Foreign Affairs*: ["A Better Tool to Counter China's Unfair Trade Practices"](#) by Alex Raskolnikov and Benn Steil (February 19)
- *Foreign Policy*: ["Austria's Schallenberg on Vance Speech in Munich, Ukraine Negotiations"](#) by Rishi Lyengar (February 19)

- *South China Morning Post*: "[Trump's proposed 25% tariffs would 'spare China' but hurt its neighbours: analysts](#)" by Ji Siqi (February 19)
- *Foreign Policy*: "[Trump Could Make China Great Again](#)" by James Crabtree (February 18)
- *Foreign Policy*: "[Xi Sends Message to China's Private Sector](#)" by Jason Palmer (February 18)
- *The Washington Post*: "[Opinion | The tactical ignorance of Elon Musk](#)" by Philip Bump (February 19)
- *The New York Times*: "[Trump's Pivot Toward Putin's Russia Upends Generations of U.S. Policy](#)" by Peter Baker (February 18)
- *Foreign Affairs*: "[China Doesn't Want to Lead an Axis: Beijing's Deep Doubts About Russia and North Korea](#)" by Sergey Radchenko (February 18)
- *The New York Times*: "[Opinion | Why Trump's Bullying Is Going to Backfire](#)" by Thomas Friedman (February 18)
- *Bloomberg*: "[US's Ever-Evolving Trade War Is a Recipe for Disaster](#)" by the Editorial Board (February 18)
- *Bloomberg*: "[The Simple Start to Ending the EU Security Nightmare](#)" by Marcus Ashworth (February 18)
- *The New York Times*: "[Opinion | Vance's Munich Disgrace](#)" by Bret Stephens (February 18)
- *The Washington Post*: "[America's new foreign policy: Who cares?](#)" by Eugene Robinson (February 18)
- *The Wall Street Journal*: "[China Sends Message to Its Tech Leaders: We Need You](#)" by Raffaele Huang (February 17)
- *The Wall Street Journal*: "[The New Plan for Western Companies Is ABC: 'Anything But China'](#)" by Liza Lin (February 17)
- *The Wall Street Journal*: "[Will Ukraine Be Trump's Vietnam?](#)" by William McGurn (February 17)
- Council on Foreign Relations: "[Donald Trump Wants Reciprocity in Trade: Here's a Closer Look](#)" by Edward Alden (February 14)
- *Foreign Affairs*: "[Why Biden's Economic Ambitions Fell Short](#)" by Jason Furman (February 13)

What's Happening Around Town? ↓

- Past Events -

- [How will Congress approach US-China relations? A conversation with Reps. John Moolenaar and Raja Krishnamoorthi](#) February 25 hosted by the Brookings Institution
- [Changing Geopolitics of China and Russia in the Arctic | Asia Society](#) February 25 hosted by Asia Society
- [2025 U.S.-Japan Security Seminar](#) February 20 hosted by CSIS

- Upcoming Events -

- [The Two Sessions: What Will China Do on Stimulus, Trade Wars, and Tech Competition? | Asia Society](#) March 6 hosted by Asia Society
- [Globalizing Perspectives on AI Safety](#) February 29 hosted by Brookings Institution
- [Launch Event: Critical Minerals and the Future of the U.S. Economy](#) February 27 hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies
- [Dr. Paul Gruenwald on Trump 2.0, AI, and New Globalization](#) February 27 hosted by Asia Society

- [C. Peter McColough Series on International Economics With Michael S. Barr](#) February 18 hosted by Council on Foreign Relations
- [The Future of the Panama Canal](#) February 13 hosted by Wilson Center
- [Trump, Tariffs, and Trade Wars | The Capital Cable #106](#) February 13 hosted by CSIS

What ICAS Is Up To



BCCC Commentary

Private Climate Action Needs Government Leadership to be Truly Successful

*By Zhangchen Wang
February 13, 2025*

The private sector's role in addressing climate change has attracted significant attention in recent years, particularly as an alternative force amidst the volatility of governmental climate policies in democracies. Frequent shifts in climate priorities between administrations have intensified the search for more consistent and long-term efforts, elevating private actions to a prominent position in combating climate change. Indeed, largely driven by profit incentives, the private sector often demonstrates a sustained commitment to climate change mitigation. However, this profit-driven nature also reveals the inherent limitations of private climate actions, which cannot replace the comprehensive leadership and regulatory capacity of governments. To achieve transformative and widespread climate goals, government intervention remains indispensable, pushing efforts beyond the upper limits of private sector initiatives and ensuring maximum effectiveness in addressing the climate crisis.



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TnT Commentary

No Thaw in Sight: U.S.-China Trade War Likely to Persist beyond 2025

*By Yilun Zhang
February 24, 2025*



As April 1 approaches—the deadline set by President Trump's America First Trade Policy for a sweeping review of China's various trade and economic practices—hope for a stable U.S.-China trade parley is fading. The primary differences between the two economies remain vast, and unless one side makes significant structural compromises, any negotiation focused merely on reducing the trade deficit or boosting U.S. jobs is likely to fail, much like it did during Trump's first term.

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MAP Commentary

Who owns the Arctic? Trump’s vision and the global power struggle

By Nong Hong
February 10, 2025

Recent discussions surrounding US President Donald Trump’s interest in acquiring Greenland – and even hinting at territorial ambitions regarding Canada – have reignited debates about Arctic geopolitics. While such proposals may seem far-fetched, they reflect deeper strategic concerns, particularly regarding control over the Northwest Passage, Arctic resources, and competition with China. Rather than viewing these statements as isolated rhetoric, it is crucial to analyse their implications within the broader geopolitical landscape.

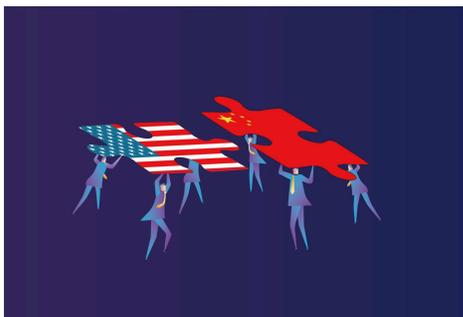


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MAP Commentary

Trump’s Impact on Research Cooperation

By Nong Hong
February 7, 2025



The return of Donald Trump to the White House has sparked concerns about the future of U.S.-China research collaboration. A second Trump administration may prioritize shifting geopolitical strategies, national security concerns, and the reduction of dependence on China in critical technologies. Such policies would likely influence the scope and dynamics of scientific cooperation between the two nations and affect various high-impact research fields and thus the global scientific landscape.

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---ICAS In the News---



On Monday, February 24, 2025, Senior Fellow Sourabh Gupta was [quoted](#) in China Daily discussing the the US stance on Ukraine.

- “While NATO will continue to be the premier Western defense body in the Euro-Atlantic space, a nucleus of autonomous Western and Central European defense – and defense industrial base – capability will also coalesce in the years ahead”

On Saturday, February 22, 2025, Senior Fellow Sourabh Gupta was [quoted](#) in the South China Morning Post discussing the Trump’s trade war.

- “Trump has not poisoned the well. They will not poison the well,” he added.

On Wednesday, February 19, 2025, Senior Fellow Sourabh Gupta was [quoted](#) in the South China Morning Post discussing the prospect of multilateralism.

- “The Chinese side is trying to feel these guys out. Who are they? What do they want?”

On Sunday, February 16, 2025, Senior Fellow Sourabh Gupta [discussed](#) President Trump’s Tariff Threats on China Daily

- “All these reports are due around early April,” Gupta said, adding that “Trump will then start using them to impose a tariff here and get leverage there.”
- Trump’s pending trade reviews, due by April 1, are likely to accuse China of breaching agreements or employing “nonmarket practices”, setting the stage for escalated measures. “The reports will inevitably criticize China, giving Trump leverage,” Gupta said.

On Saturday, February 8, 2025, Senior Fellow Sourabh Gupta [discussed](#) the challenges and opportunities posed by Tariffs on China Daily.

- “The hope is that the rough-and-ready stability in US-China relations over the last 18 months of the Biden administration can be extended forward during the next 18 months of the Trump administration and much beyond.”