

The United States and China: Competition, Partnership and Containment

Haider Ali Hussein¹, Amjad Taama^{2*}, and Mohammed Kadhim Abbas AL-Maeni³

Abstract

The United States and China have undergone many changes in their relationship in the past years, but in recent years, relations between them, reached many critical junctures, especially in trade, and other political and military fields. It is well known, that no study of any problem of international relations is complete without studying its future possibilities, based on data and indicators of reality at all levels. From this perspective, this study aims to set future possibilities for the policy of the United States towards China, since the track and form of this policy can be important factors in determining the strategic dimensions of the international interaction process in its future dimension, and impact on the structure of the international system. The future possibilities of US policy toward China will undoubtedly determine the nature of relations between the two parties within its assumed timeframe. On this basis, the problem of study can be raised about how the future of US policy toward China can be studied, which leads to a set of questions. These centers on: what is the future track of American policy toward China? What are the driving factors for each possibility, whether it is cooperation, competition, conflict, or partnership?

The statements and assumptions made by the basic theories in the field of international relations concerned, with an understanding and interpretation of cases of cooperation, competition and conflict, which remains conditional on a number of conditions.

Key words: *the United States, China, politics, possibilities, the future.*

1. Introduction

U.S. and China have undergone many changes in their relationship in the past years, but in recent years, relations between them, reached many critical junctures, especially in trade, and other political and military fields.

Earlier, eight presidents of the United States of America, from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama, believed in the efficacy of using a strategy known as engagement with China, based on the belief that its political and economic embrace would make it more liberal and would facilitate its containment process. Donald Trump's assumption of power revisited the origin of the strategy, and gave way to punitive measures and escalatory policies, to the threat of declaring trade war, in order to undermine the Chinese rival and try to tame it.

It is agreed that no study of any problem of international relations is complete without studying its future possibilities, based on data and indicators of reality at all levels. According to this perspective, the future vision of the policy of the United States of America toward China is a very important topic, since the track and form of this policy can be an important factor in determining the strategic dimensions of the

¹Mustansiriyah Center for Arab and International Studies/ Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq / hyder_irq@yahoo.comE-mail:

^{2*}Mustansiriyah Center for Arab and International Studies/ Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq / amjadztatmsc@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq amjdzain@yahoo.comE-mail: mohammed.kh.law@nuc.edu.iq³Al-Nisour University College, Baghdad, Iraq / E-mail:

international interaction process in its future dimension. So this study aims to present a set of future possibilities.

The importance of this issue arises from the fact that the future form of this policy will have an important impact on the structure of the international system. The difficulty of the topic gives it additional importance, arising from the inability to assert with certainty the final nature of the future relationship between the two parties.

The basic problem of this study can come from the answers that can be presented based on the statements and assumptions by the basic theories in the field of international relations concerned. An understanding and interpretation of the cases of cooperation, competition and conflict, remain conditional due to a number of conditions.

The future possibilities of the American policy toward China will undoubtedly determine the nature of relations between the two parties within its assumed timeframe, On this basis, the problem of studying can be raised about how the future of American policy toward China can be studied, which leads to a set of questions. It centers on: what is the future track of American policy toward China; what are the driving factors for each possibility, whether it is cooperation, competition, conflict, or partnership; what are the consequences of each possibility, and what is the likely shape of relations between the two parties.

To deal with these questions, we must formulate a hypothesis of this study, which will be in a future dimension.

The American policy towards China is a candidate to take multiple problems according to the possibilities of its emerging factors and obstacles, so that a closer likelihood of reality is filtered based on scientific analysis. The trend towards escalation and conflict is bounded by some factors, driven by others, while the progress of relations towards cooperation and partnership is supported by data, and limited by others. Still there are odds for a future scene heading towards a certain possibility in each stage based on the perception and response from each party.

Noting that aspects of the topic adopting the new liberal theory in international relations, grants the possibilities of the future relationship.

2. The United States and China, Conflict and Competition

Several factors are driving the possibility that relations between the United States and China will be directed toward tensions at the highest level.

2.1 Conflict Factors

There is a group of inputs, which feed the possibility of escalating tension and friction between China, and the United States, which may lead to aggravation of escalation and issues exciting conflicts both of them, in light of China's strong desire into convert to a superpower. This depends on strategic indicators, as came in the United State national defense strategy for 2018.

China is steadily pursuing economic and military modernization programs, through which it seeks to dominate and control the Pacific region, on the other hand, the Indian region in the short term, and achieving global superiority in the long term. Chinese economic growth rates will continue to rise until 2025, along with the growing Chinese political role in many international issues.

Among the indicators, which increase tension and the possibility of escalation, is the Sino-Russian strategic convergence. Strategic partnership relations have been established, which include strengthening security, strategic and military cooperation, by signing important documents, such as: the declaration on the advancement of international law; the joint statement to promote global strategic stability; the joint statement on the development of information and cyberspace, with the need to encourage the establishment of an international multi-polar system, for global strategic stability; Among the signs of tension, too, is the issue of conflict in the South China Sea . (Al-Asfour, 2012)

In addition to the Taiwan issue, which greatly affects the relations between the two parties, especially after Donald Trump assumed the White House presidency in 2017, who directed his policy towards China to come closer to the leadership in Taiwan. This resulted in the approval of an arms deal to Taiwan, amounting to 1.4 billion dollars, which aroused the ire of China and its concerns about this escalation policy.

Additionally China's continued pursuit of policies, which the United States views as hostile, like deliberately prolonging the trade deficit with the United States, continuing technology transfers and militarizing the South China Sea, in addition to minorities and human rights issues, and the energy strategy pursued by China in a number of United States spheres of influence .

2.2 Indicators of conflict and confrontation

The United States realized the extent of the Chinese threat to its national security, and the nature of the challenge posed by the escalating Chinese policies, which necessitated the American administration to adopt decisive steps to change Chinese behavior in the strategic issues that we mentioned above.

As an American response to the Chinese challenge, the United States adopted a new strategy, based on confrontation and regaining American influence. This is what is likely to escalate the conflict, leading to the possibility of confrontation between the two parties. As a practical implementation of this strategy, the United States worked in the investment field to enact new legislations to conduct stricter security audits of Chinese investment until 2026, in addition to a number of customs measures. This led to decline in the volume of Chinese exports to the United States of America, by an average of 9.7 during the first four months of 2019, as well as the decrease in Chinese and American mutual investment due to strained relations. (Eid, 1994)

The intense competition is also moving towards wider Asian markets. It is noticeable that, there is an accelerated Chinese demands for various energy sources, while we find that the intended region in the Chinese energy strategy falls within the circle of American strategic concerns. This is why China resorted to opening markets in this region in different ways; the most important is to start investing in energy. Indeed, China has made remarkable progress in the Gulf States, Iran, Iraq, as in Africa, in order to secure a disciplined flow of energy sources, in a move that observers considered as strategic necessity to sustain its economic performance. This indicates unambiguously that the international scene will remain charged with indicators of a fierce struggle between the two parties, in order to acquire the largest amount of oil offered on the international market, which will generate a state of instability in this market .(Rajim, 2008)

The conflict and competition do not stop at this point, but rather go to other areas, including the monetary policy sector. The indicators go towards the continuation of the American -China trade conflict, as the Chinese government will convert the exchange rate to the yuan currency, in order to liberate and eliminate the American pressure.

The most important factor in the persistence of tension and competition between China and the United States of America lies in the market for advanced communications technology and the fifth generation communications market (G5). This revolutionary new technology, which China considers the backbone of its well-known strategy (made in China 2025), and the United States of America regards in return as a source of grave concern and a direct threat to its national security.

China has demonstrated its ability to initiate a trade war against America to maintain its technical program, while the list of American accusations against Chinese companies has escalated, in the forefront is the Huawei Company to include the acquisition of trade secrets. This prompted the United States to launch a package of sanctions on communications equipments and devices associated with the fifth generation of the internet (G5), to include Huawei's investments in transport infrastructure. Sanctions also extend to intercontinental information systems: that is, submarine cables, to prevent Beijing from becoming a technical superpower. (Al-Lababidi, 2019)

Regarding the strategy (Made in China in 2025), the Chinese government is working according to a systematic plan, to transfer its position to the global value chain, to become a leader on the global level in the areas of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies for this purpose .(Leonard, 2018)

In light of the current state of tension and escalation, former American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warns of a possible confrontation between the United States and China, and likens the existing situation to a new cold war. He calls at the same time, to find a mechanism to control the acceleration of events between them; therefore, the two sides should monitor the impact of their actions against each other in all parts of the world, while paying attention to the other's goals.

Kissinger puts forward his vision, which is troubled by the dangers of the trade confrontation between China and the United States, and the persistence of the exchange of duties on the goods and commodities of each country. He cautions, "If we allow the conflict to escalate, the result may be worse than what happened in Europe in the twentieth century, as World War I, broke out as a result of a relatively small crisis. Weapons are much stronger today, and if we allow conflict to spin out of control, the result may be worse ". (Kissinger, 2019)

While the American scientist Mearsheimer believes that if China continues with its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, it is possible that the United States and China, will engage in intense security conflicts, with great potential for war between them. (Wover 2019)

It is clear from the above, that the intertwining and opposing interests between China and the United States of America could lead to a state of competition and conflict in more than Issues, stage and region. In light of the escalation and growth of the aspirations of the two parties and the clash of strategies on standing and influence, this increases the likelihood of pushing for the widening range of the conflict.

3. The United States and China: cooperation and containment

The optimistic second trend of international relations believes that the America -China relations will move towards relative convergence and cooperation, which increases the possibility of achieving containment policy through partnership and convergence mechanisms, as many indicators and data indicate that this can be achieved.

3.1 The cooperation factors

The two parties recognize the importance of complementarity in bilateral relations, after adopting the mechanism of strategic economic dialogue, which will be a gateway to broader understandings. Convergence and overlapping of interests, awareness of the risks of conflict and the repercussions of continued competition, between China and the United States, would push the two parties towards sidelining differences and entering into joint coordination, enhancing opportunities for cooperation, in order to maintain economic gains and deepen understandings on many international issues.

These signs indicate closer convergence and cooperation of Sino-American relations that will take place in the future, since China adopts the United States markets and high technology, while the United States sees China as the place to build investment projects, so that other competitive economic powers do not control it. It is also worth noting, that the burdens of leadership, the inability to lead and individual performance motivated the United States to open more broadly to China in order to achieve understandings consistent with current and future challenges. This has led to the continuance of the strategic dialogue, which is a watershed in relations of the two countries. One of its results was agreement on the concept of terrorism and the security threat, according to the both parties' vision. (Kiwan, 2019)

In this regard, we find that other important factors help communications rather than dissonance. In this regard, Brzezinski notes that "one of the basic factors for achieving a rapprochement between China and the United States is the mutual vision for the importance of developing an adaptation mechanism with the global challenges, from climate change to terrorism". Through this vision, pushing for cooperation will offer exceptional opportunities and will be present in the field of application, in common positions, regarding the deployment of the United Nations peacekeeping forces, in the event of a serious failure of institutions and systems in developing countries, as well as international crises, and facing fluctuations economy. (Shalaby, 2009)

China and the United States also realize the necessity to discuss and then agree initiatives aimed at keeping the world free from nuclear weapons and preventing their proliferation. (Imam, 2008)

3.2 Indicators of cooperation and containment

As a result of the common awareness of the mutual need, and the importance of prioritizing the language of dialogue over escalation, the scope of the strategic dialogue between the two parties included multiple directions, such as future challenges, economic openness, and the sustainability of trade consultations, the expansion of trade in goods and services, and the protection of intellectual property.

In this context, the two parties decided, that trade talks should be held in Beijing in May 2018. After that, progress was made on basic issues, and it was agreed to continue constructive dialogue between the two parties in Washington in May 2019. There was a common consensus on effective measures to significantly reduce the trade deficit in commodities of the United States, and in return, China would greatly increase its purchases of American goods and services, which helps support growth and employment in the United States.

In addition to signing the first phase of the joint trade agreement between the two countries on January 15, 2020, which constituted an important step towards finding a satisfactory settlement to the disputes of the two parties, the agreement provides for the gradual abolition of the additional customs duties that the two countries had exchanged for the goods. This is in preparation for its final cancellation, to facilitate access to the markets of the two countries, including financial markets; China will increase the value of its purchases of American goods and services by 200 billion dollars.

It can be seen that the United States has sought to deepen the scope of economic cooperation with China even in the most severe periods of escalation of disputes; this is what helps to link trade exchange, reduce

conflicts, disputes, and increase international cooperation. (China and America: Cooperation and strategic conflict , 2015)

It is important to stress, that the Chinese leadership is well aware of the United States' pursuit of containing it, through partnerships and employment of Chinese capabilities. To achieve the goals of the American policy, in light of the containment and approach strategy it is adopting. But China also understands the necessity of serious engagement with the United States across several ranges; it could be where China can have a clear influence within the framework of international roles.

It can be said, that the possibilities and indicators of escalation proposed in advance are matched by the existence of common interests, this means that there is a state of oscillation up and down in relations, just as there are reasons for tension, there are reasons for succeed and strengthen relations, since differences are manifestations of competition between a rising global power and another dominant force, its role is slowly shrinking, it is also a reflection of real contrast in the Chinese and American concept of the global political, economic, social and cultural system . (Ismail, 2018)

When conducting an assessment of the consequences and repercussions of continuing conflict, competition, and escalation, the United States finds that some of the gains will suffer a significant retreat, and that moving toward active, multifaceted participatory action would achieve a large part of the goals of American policy. At the same time, these goals should not stop at economic partnership only, but go further, as entering the United States by partnership helps it to confront the Chinese strategy. It will also block the way for China's attempts to reshape the rules of the global economic system, through its new financial institutions and its ambitious global projects, foremost of which is the Belt and Road Project. (Obehi, 2019)

Therefore, rapprochement and cooperation pave the way for the implementation of the policy of containment in partnership, which should be characterized by the nature of pragmatism and the prevalence of common interests. For the perception of both parties, the degree of complexity in their relationship and the size of interdependence that includes all aspects, therefore, this interdependence and complexity, leads somewhat driving towards the two parties' sense of the importance of the dialogue objective to clarify each one's intentions towards the other, and the minimum conditions for both. (Mabrouk, 2016)

The evaluation of the costs and benefits of the various political options continuously pushes the two countries to formulate a new perceptual balance, based on the existing regional pattern. This process has confirmed that, the best option through continuing adaptation and adjustment among them, regarding various areas and problematic issues, and settling them, is through dialogue and consultation, which opens the horizons of coexistence, rapprochement and paves the way for deeper strategic dialogue at multiple levels. (Obehi, 2019)

In light of unstable circumstances at the global level, the United States should work to stop the stalemate in positions with China. The features of the volatile relationship between them indicate cooperation alongside the intensification of competition. In the long term, the United States and China need to create deeper dialogue mechanisms, shared vision of the international system, in order not to attract some individual countries toward forming competing groups among themselves. (Zhao, 2016)

The United States should also choose between cooperation, engagement, or confrontation, as a policy-oriented framework toward China, since engagement with China is the dominant trend in American policy toward it. All these factors help us to understand why the focus on China has become a strategic priority. It is important to note that the United States's interests make it imperative that China not be excluded from any strategic arrangements in East Asia. It must send messages of reassurance to it about its alliances with Japan, and South Korea and change the concept of the Chinese vision of protectionist policy that it pursues with these two countries within the scope of China's vital sphere. (Roberts, 2014)

This gives the United States greater freedom and margin of movement in relation to North Korea, towards East Asia and the securing of shipping routes in the waters of the Pacific Ocean, starting from an American vision of the East Asia region's position in future security arrangements. This does not stop at American interests only, there is a Chinese desire to secure its strategic depth and geographic circumference, and this is what Beijing regards as a supreme national interest, and so it can be agreed with the United States to achieve this. (Derek J. Mitchellm., 2019)

After presenting and analyzing these data, the researcher's opinion goes toward the opinion that the United States graduated by realizing and seeing the data of the international system and the position of China in it, then devised the specific mechanisms of dealing with it after sensing its strengths . On this basis, we find that the United States has made use of its various tools to block China's rise in the international system, in

order to achieve strategic goals in encircling it and influencing its interests. This is as part of a broader policy aimed at curtailing international roles seeking to change the structure of the international system.

In sum, Sino-US relations are proceeding according to a complex equation consisting of monolithic and contradictory elements governed by the law of benefit, so the horizon of future possibilities, in our view, will be open towards a mixture of cooperation and conflict.

4. Conclusion:

Accordingly, the changes in the elements of Chinese power and its emergence as an international party, possessing the capabilities of influence, especially in the economic sphere, led the United States to realize the challenges of the Chinese rise on its position and policy in the international system. The United States then worked to limit this rise through various gates, including encirclement, containment and competition, conflict and partnership; also, it employed a range of tools to implement these policies.

Most of the evidence and data indicate that the current century will be the stage for China's supremacy in several areas. This is a source of concern for the United States, which seeks to remain superior to ensure the implementation of its policy, which will present multiple possibilities, for the nature of American policy toward China and how the relationship between the two parties will be.

American policy towards China, including its goals and tools, is directed towards a mysterious path, which is subject to being affected by several factors. Most notably the extent of confidence between the two countries and the fear of each of them in the fluctuation of the balance of power in the international system. Through the data, the American calculations towards China have changed in terms of direction, but without changing at the level of content. Geo-strategic standards still occupy an important space in the American approach, with significant and influential progress in the role of trade and economic dimensions in determining the American policy toward the Chinese rise in the international system.

The future of the relationship between the United States of America and China will depend on the ability of the two countries to contain and conceal the differences between them and not escalate tensions to the point of conflict. The direction of the relationship seems to be in a state of continuous transformation, because the two parties realize the importance of cooperation and partnership and the removal of differences and sources of conflict.

Thus, according to the foregoing, the containment policy through new frameworks, including partnership and cooperation, can play a pivotal role in determining the nature of America - China relations and the pattern of American policy toward China, within the framework of the foreseeable future at the very least, and this option may be the most likely and acceptable.

References

- [1] Al-Asfour, S. (2012). *Competitive Politics*. Kuwait: the Arab planning summary.
- [2] Al-Lababidi, W. (2019, 2 17). (Fifth Generation) ignites the struggle for hegemony between China and America. *Al-Bayan newspaper*, 14123. Retrieved from https://media.albayan.ae/images/fayezomar/file8+920190217.pdf?_ga=2.109404621
- [3] *China and America: Cooperation and strategic conflict* . (2015, 5 20). Retrieved from arabic mitiatory: <http://www.arabic-mitiatory.com/ty.topic>
- [4] Derek J. Mitchellm., A. A. (2019). U.S. security strategy for the Asia Pacific Region. *An American Review*. doi:10.1080 / 00927670109601496, 2011, P.164-165
- [5] Eid, H. (1994, July). American-Chinese relations between trade budget and human rights . *international politics journal*, 117, p. 251.
- [6] Imam, B. A. (2008). Preventive wars in American strategic thought, master thesis. 65. Biskra, Algeria: Muhammad Khidr University.
- [7] Ismail, H. (2018, 10 26). *United States - China relations where to*. Retrieved from China today : http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctarabic/2018/kfg/201810/t20181026_800145346.html
- [8] Kissinger, H. (2019, 11 22). Kissinger: America and China, on the threshold of the Cold War. *Asharq Al Awsat*, 14969. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2FXOHE3>

- [9] Kiwan, M. (2019, 9 21). *revealing the hidden in the secrets kingdom: the lost file for Chinese Muslims*. Retrieved from <http://minbaralhurriyya.org/index.php/achives/2594>
- [10] Leonard, M. (2018). The US and China Are the Closest of Enemies. *Project Syndicate*. Retrieved from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/america-china-closest-of-enemies-by-mark-leonard-2018-11?barrier=accesspaylog>
- [11] Mabrouk, S. S. (2016). *Containment and participation: The American strategy in Asia*. Retrieved from Links centre for research and strategic studies: <http://rawabetcenter.com/archives/22490>
- [12] Obehi, M. (2019, 6 20). *China... A great strategy to confront great America*. Retrieved from Al-Jazeera website: <http://bit.ly/2tl0x8D>
- [13] Rajim, R. (2008). *A giant in China*. Saudi Arabia: Al-Abeikan for publishing.
- [14] Roberts, D. (2014, 6 18). Iraq crisis threatens Chinese oil investments, . *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-17/iraq-crisis-threatens-chinese-oil-investments>
- [15] Shalaby, A. (2009). Thirty factors in relationships. *international politics journal*(78).
- [16] Wover, B. S. (n.d.). China financially linked to the United States . *future horizons*(8), p. 55.
- [17] Zhao, M. (2016). *Which Way for US-China Relations Under Trump?* Retrieved from Project Syndicate: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/donald-trump-china-policy-by-minghao-zhao-2016-11>