

ESCALATING TENSIONS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON U.S. CLOSING CHINESE CONSULATE IN HOUSTON

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The U.S.'s decision to [close China's consulate in Houston](#) is an unprecedented escalation in the steadily deteriorating ties between the world's two largest economies. The Trump administration has accused the consulate and other Chinese diplomatic missions in the country of economic espionage, visa fraud and attempted theft of scientific research — allegations that China has denied. It has announced visa restrictions on students, imposed sanctions on Chinese officials over a Hong Kong security law and is reportedly considering a sweeping travel ban on the millions of members of China's ruling Communist Party. The consulate decision is by far the most drastic measure. This is the first time a Chinese mission is being closed in the U.S. since both countries normalised diplomatic relations in 1979. Since the tariff war that President Trump launched in 2018, China has retaliated against every hostile move by the U.S. China made matters worse by providing refuge in its San Francisco consulate to one of the Chinese researchers against whom the U.S. has issued an arrest warrant because she allegedly lied to the authorities about her ties to the Army.

The U.S.-China tensions are no longer about trade and technology. What started as a trade war has snowballed into a larger geopolitical contest between the two superpowers, something the world hasn't seen since the hostile competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. President Trump, who is under attack at home for his handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic, may be finding comfort in ramping up tensions with China in an election year. But what makes the crisis dangerous in the long term is that there is a growing consensus in Washington that a hostile China, resorting to large-scale espionage, poses a serious threat to the U.S.-dominated international order. The Washington establishment, which had fought Trump's overtures towards Russia and several other policy measures, is in line with the President in his confrontational policy towards China, which has already done serious damage to bilateral relations that cannot be reversed easily. Incidentally, the U.S.-China crisis is unfolding at a time when Beijing is also acting more assertively in Asia, picking fights with countries in its neighbourhood, from India to Vietnam and Malaysia. The message from China is that it is ready for a long game of escalation, as long as the U.S. keeps playing it. This is a cyclical trap — measures and countermeasures keep taking ties to new lows with no possibility of an exit. If this deterioration is not arrested immediately, the U.S. and China risk a total breakdown in diplomatic relations. That is bad news for the whole world.

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