

A CHILL IN U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

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

A slew of recent announcements on China by U.S. President Donald Trump is a clear indication that the competition between the U.S. and China is likely to sharpen in the post-COVID world. On May 29, the Trump administration said it would revoke Hong Kong's special trade status under U.S. law. The administration also passed an order limiting the entry of certain Chinese graduate students and researchers who may have ties to the People's Liberation Army. The U.S. President has also ordered financial regulators to closely examine Chinese firms listed in U.S. stock markets, and warned those that do not comply with U.S. laws could be delisted.

Americans have had a strange fascination for China ever since the early 1900s when Protestant missionaries decided that it was God's work to bring salvation to the Chinese. Books like *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck and *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow in the 1930s romanticised the country. Even after the Chinese communists seized power, the Americans hoped to cohabit with Mao Zedong in a world under U.S. hegemony. The Chinese allowed them to believe this and extracted their price. U.S. President Richard Nixon gave China the international acceptability it craved in return for being admitted to Mao's presence in 1972; President Jimmy Carter terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to normalise relations with China in 1978; President George H.W. Bush washed away the sins of Tiananmen in 1989 for ephemeral geopolitical gain; and Bill Clinton, who as a presidential candidate had criticised Bush for indulging the Chinese, proceeded as President to usher the country into the World Trade Organization at the expense of American business. All American administrations since the 1960s have been complicit in China's rise in the unrealised hope that it will become a 'responsible stakeholder' under Pax Americana.

Editorial | [Skyrocketing tensions: On U.S.-China ties](#)

The Chinese are hard-nosed and unsentimental about the U.S. They have always pursued America with a selfish purpose, albeit couched in high principle. They have spoken words that the Americans wanted to hear — anti-Soviet rhetoric during the Cold War and market principles thereafter — to disguise their real purpose of thwarting U.S. hegemony. Ever since Cold Warrior John Foster Dulles spoke in 1958 of weaning China and other "satellites" away from the Soviets through regime change, known as "peaceful evolution", every Chinese leader from Chairman Mao to President Xi Jinping has been clear-eyed that the U.S. represents an existential threat to the continued supremacy of the communist regime. Mao put it best, when he told high-ranking leaders in November 1959, that the "U.S. is attempting to carry out its aggression and expansion with a much more deceptive tactic... In other words, it wants to keep its order and change our system." (Memoirs, Chinese leader Bo Yibo). The collapse of the Soviet Union only reinforced this view and strengthened China's resolve to resist by creating its own parallel universe. China is building an alternate trading system (the Belt and Road Initiative); a multilateral banking system under its control (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank); its own global positioning system (BeiDou); digital payment platforms (WeChat Pay and Alipay); a world-class digital network (Huawei 5G); cutting-edge technological processes in sunrise industries; and a modern military force. It is doing this under the noses of the Americans and some of it with the financial and technological resources of the West.

Voices of caution have been few and far between, among them political scientist John Mearsheimer, who wrote in 2005 that the rise of China would not be peaceful at all, but the world chose to believe General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Hu Jintao's assurances

about “peaceful rise”. When satellite evidence showed that China was building military installations in the South China Sea, China’s Southeast Asian neighbours and the U.S. preferred to believe assurances to the contrary given by Mr. Xi on the lawns of the White House in 2015.

It is only under Mr. Trump that the Americans are finally acknowledging the uneasy fact that the Chinese are not graven in their image. He has called China out on trade practices. He has called China out on 5G. It was Mr. Trump’s 2017 National Security Strategy document that, perhaps for the first time, clubbed China along with Russia as a challenge to American power, influence and interests. His recent China-specific restrictions on trade and legal migration are, possibly, only the beginning of a serious re-adjustment.

Also read | [U.S. to bar Chinese flights from June 16](#)

A full-spectrum debate on China is now raging across the U.S. Former White House Chief of Staff Steve Bannon declared that the U.S. is already at war with China. Others like diplomat Richard Haass and former president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, warn that a new Cold War will be a mistake. Scholar Julian Gewirtz, in his brilliant essay, ‘The Chinese Reassessment of Interdependence’, talks about a similar process under way in Beijing. Both sides are acutely aware how closely their economies are tied together: from farm to factory, the U.S. is heavily dependent on supply chains in China and the Chinese have been unable to break free of the dollar. If Mr. Trump’s wish is to disentangle China’s supply chains, Mr. Xi is equally determined to escape from the U.S. ‘chokehold’ on technology. To what extent the de-coupling is possible is yet to be determined, but one thing is inevitable, India will become part of the collateral damage.

Will Hong Kong become a game-changer in the post-COVID world? China’s decision to enact the new national security law for Hong Kong has been condemned in unison by the U.S. and its Western allies as an assault on human freedoms. Why is this significant? The points of divergence, even dispute, between them have so far been in the material realm. With Hong Kong, the U.S.-China rivalry may, possibly, be entering the ideological domain. For some time now there are reports about Chinese interference in the internal affairs of democracies. Countries in the West have tackled this individually, always mindful of not jeopardising their trade with China. Hong Kong may be different. It is not only a bastion for Western capitalism in the East, but more importantly the torch-bearer of Western democratic ideals. Think of it as a sort of Statue of Liberty; it holds aloft the torch of freedom and democracy for all those who pass through Hong Kong en route to China. This is an assault on beliefs, so to speak.

Analysis | [Are the U.S. and China entering a new Cold War?](#)

This comes on the back of not unreasonable demands that China should come clean on its errors of omission in the early days of COVID-19, when greater transparency and quicker action might have prevented, or at least mitigated, the pandemic. In the months ahead, more information may become public, from sources inside China itself, about the shortcomings of the regime, that will further fuel a debate on the superiority of the Chinese Model as an alternative to democracy. Will this form the ideological underpinning for the birth of a new Cold War? That will depend on who wins in Washington in November; on whether profit will again trump politics in Europe; and on how skilfully the Wolf Warriors of China can manipulate global public opinion. The lines are beginning to be drawn between the Americans on the one side and China on the other. A binary choice is likely to test to the limit India’s capacity to maintain strategic and decisional autonomy.

Vijay Gokhale is a former Foreign Secretary of India and a former Ambassador to China

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days trial now. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Dear reader,

We have been keeping you up-to-date with information on the developments in India and the world that have a bearing on our health and wellbeing, our lives and livelihoods, during these difficult times. To enable wide dissemination of news that is in public interest, we have increased the number of articles that can be read free, and extended free trial periods. However, we have a request for those who can afford to subscribe: please do. As we fight disinformation and misinformation, and keep apace with the happenings, we need to commit greater resources to news gathering operations. We promise to deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Please enter a valid email address.

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Start your 14 days trial now [Sign Up](#)

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or Subscribe to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com