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Anti-Americanism will remain the foundation of the PRC's foreign policy

By Charles Parton

New geostrategic thinking for a more competitive age
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Executive summary

- Whatever policies Donald Trump, President of the United States (US), pursues towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) will not make a difference to the long-term aim of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP aims to make the PRC the world's most powerful country and to change global governance to better suit the CCP's interests and values. The party sees this dethroning of the US as involving a long-term struggle against hostile forces. While the CCP has long harboured a suspicion of the US, putting this perceived 'struggle' with America centre stage is the work of Xi.
- Crucial to effecting the CCP's foreign policy is the strategy of the United Front Work Department (UFW). Its essence is to identify the 'main enemy' and seek to move other parties from a position of amity or alliance with the main enemy to one of neutrality, or from a position of neutrality to the CCP's side.
- There are eight identifiable ways in which the CCP's united front strategy is applied to its long-term goal:
 - Portraying Beijing as the leader of the so-called 'Global South'. Xi and other leaders spend time meeting and cultivating relationships with the leaders of even the smallest countries. All have one vote in the United Nations (UN) and other international fora.
 - Reforming existing global governance structures to include an anti-US bias. The CCP supports the UN and other international organisations, but wants to reform them and change their values.
 - Building alternate structures. Beyond reforming international organisations, the CCP assiduously promotes the establishment of new ones with a different focus from bodies currently led by Euro-Atlantic nations. These organisations range from the BRICS gathering, to the Asian



Infrastructure Investment Bank and the ten member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

- Characterising the US as a menace on the world stage, in contrast to Beijing's approach to foreign relations. This includes accusations of American bullying tactics and 'cold war' thinking, among many other claims.
 - Aligning with Russia and countries which oppose the US. The CCP works on the principle that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.
 - Accusing the US of interference in regional affairs and of being an unreliable ally.
 - De-dollarisation: the CCP's desire to move away from reliance on the US dollar as the main currency for trade and finance is long-standing and given added impetus by sanctions imposed on Russia.
 - Denigrating the US and its systems. The CCP uses its extensive propaganda machinery to weaken the appeal of the US to both domestic and international audiences. It portrays American democracy as seriously flawed, inferior to Beijing's own 'whole process people's democracy'.
- Relations between Beijing and Washington reached their nadir in the period from summer 2022 and November 2023. Xi and Joe Biden, former President of the US, had no calls or meetings in 12 months. Typical was a paper by the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) from May 2023, which accused the US of using coercive diplomacy against developing countries, of violating the principles of fair trade, military pressure, intensifying division and antagonism in the international community, and a raft of other crimes.
 - The two countries' leaders eventually met in November 2023 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in San Francisco. High-level contacts and meetings were resumed, as



well as some consultations on international and regional issues. But tensions, accusations and cancellations remain.

- Wherever the unpredictability of Trump takes American policy – and the likelihood is that current policies on technology, tariffs, Taiwan and more will continue – the CCP’s united front strategy and the eight methods outlined in this report will continue to underpin CCP diplomacy.
- Europe and the rest of the so-called ‘Global North’ will increasingly be forced to choose between the protagonists. In line with its united front strategy, the CCP will reinforce efforts to detach America’s allies from their traditional alignment. On the other side, Trump and his new close team are unlikely to tolerate an ambiguous stance from allies. For the UK in particular, with its close trade and investment links with the US, the importance of the Five Eyes grouping and of military ties, the direction of the choice is inevitable. Europe, too, is likely to be faced with unpleasant consequences if it does not make a clear choice. The idea that economic interests and national security can be kept separate is past its sell-by date.



1.0 Introduction

Over the last year there has been a thaw in relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States (US), shown by increased high-level contacts and greater mutual communication. The return of Donald Trump, President of the US, to the White House has led to reams and decibels of speculation on the future direction of US-PRC relations. This paper sets out how, since coming to power, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has been consistent in his view that the US is the main obstacle to his ambition of making the PRC the world's most powerful country; that his foreign policy is based upon a perceived long-term 'struggle' with America; and that the trend towards increased tensions will continue. Other countries should consider how these factors influence their relations with the PRC and amend their policies accordingly.



2.0 The CCP's overall goals and struggle against the US

References to the 'second centennial goal' (100 years after the founding of the PRC in 1949) first emerged in 1997, but it was Xi who brought the slogan to centre stage. The PRC is to become a 'modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious'. To translate that from party-speak into plain English, Xi intends to:

Build China into a great modern socialist country that leads the world in terms of composite national strength and international influence by the middle of the century.¹

More pointedly, the aim is for the PRC to replace the US as the leading superpower, and to reorder global governance better to suit CCP interests and values.

In seeking to achieve this, Xi has abandoned the policy of Deng Xiaoping, former 'Paramount Leader' of the PRC, of advancing slowly without revealing final intentions, the so-called 'hide and bide' policy (it is odd how too many commentators fail to ask what Deng was hiding and for what he was biding – Deng's and Xi's ultimate intentions differed little). In internal speeches, Xi and other CCP leaders have been clear that 'struggle' against 'hostile forces' is the order of the day. Xi made the point clear in his first address to the Central Committee in January 2013:

We must diligently prepare for a long period of cooperation and of conflict between these two social systems in each of these domains [economic, technological, and military].²

Xi emphasised this again three months later in the 'Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere', which excoriated Western values and systems. He warned that:

¹ Xi Jinping, Speech: 'Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China', *Xinhua*, 16/10/2022, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

² Tanner Greer, 'Xi Jinping in Translation: China's Guiding Ideology', *Palladium Magazine*, 31/05/2019, <https://www.palladiummag.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



...the position of Western anti-China forces to pressure for urgent reform won't change, and they will continue to point the spearhead of Westernising, splitting, and "Colour Revolutions" at China.³

CCP documents and speeches have maintained this constant drumbeat. Xi himself underlined the threat at the sixth Plenum in November 2021, stating: 'Various hostile forces will never allow us to realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation smoothly.'⁴

Likewise, in the words of an April 2022 document promulgated by the Office of the Central National Security Commission and the Central Propaganda Department, and to be studied by all CCP cadres:

Hostile forces persistently seek to ferment [sic] a "Colour Revolution" within our state, vainly attempting to subvert the leadership of the CCP and the socialist institutions of our state...On the international stage, Western hostile forces have not ceased their ideological infiltration of our country, not even for a moment. They do everything in their power to promote so-called "universal values".⁵

This antagonism towards America has been reinforced by a perceived American change from cooperation to containment. In March 2023 at the 'Two Sessions' (meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), Xi declared that:

In particular, Western countries led by the US have implemented all-round containment, encirclement, and suppression against China, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country's development.⁶

³ 'Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere' ('Document no.9'), Central Committee of the Communist Party of China's General Office, *ChinaFile*, 11/08/2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

⁴ Xi Jinping, Speech: '以史为鉴、开创未来 埋头苦干、勇毅前行' ['Learn from history, create the future, work hard and move forward courageously'], *Qiushi*, 01/01/2022, <http://www.qstheory.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

⁵ '总体国家安全观学习纲要' ['The total national security paradigm: A study outline'], 中央国家安全委员会办公室 [Office of the Central National Security Commission], 14/04/2022, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

⁶ *Xinhua*, '习近平在看望参加政协会议的民建工商联界委员时强调 正确引导民营经济健康发展高质量发展' [When visiting members of the China Democratic National Construction Association and the China Federation of Industry and Commerce who attended the CPPCC meeting, Xi Jinping



A few months later, he declared that:

We must be highly vigilant against external forces fomenting a “new Cold War” and creating confrontation in the region, and resolutely oppose any country interfering in internal affairs and staging a “Colour Revolution” for any reason.⁷

The charge sheet against the US was summed up by a September 2023 commentary in the CCPs’s paper, the People’s Daily (going out under the byline of ‘Zhong Sheng’, a pseudonym for the Central Committee).

The so-called US competition amounted to comprehensive blockading, unrestricted containment, and suppression of China...The US...exposed a naked zero-sum Cold War mentality...engaging in sanctions and decoupling, using the concept of national security to impose arbitrary controls and censorship...concocting false narratives of “democracy versus authoritarianism”, forming blocs to create a “containment circle” around China, forcing other countries to choose sides, inciting confrontation and undermining peace...continually undermining China’s political system, territorial sovereignty and other core interests.⁸

With such a viewpoint, it is small wonder that the ‘struggle’ against America is at the heart of the CCP’s foreign policy.

stressed the need to correctly guide the healthy and high-quality development of the private economy’], 06/03/2023, <http://www.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

⁷ ‘China’s President Xi Jinping warns against “New Cold War” at SCO summit’, *Firstpost*, 04/07/2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

⁸ Zhong Sheng, ‘以竞争定义全部中美关系是严重误判’ [‘Defining the entire Sino-US relationship by competition is a serious misjudgement’], *People’s Daily*, 14/09/2023, <http://paper.people.com.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



3.0 Changing the global governance system and values

The CCP's response to these perceptions of hostile American intent is a long-term plan to remould global governance and values, which it sees as favouring the 'West', which first established them. Xi has expanded the tried and tested methodology of the CCP's 'united front strategy'. This and the structures behind it, led by the United Front Work Department (UFW), are integral to both the CCP's domestic and foreign policies. Mao Zedong declared that the united front was one of three 'magic weapons' (along with the party itself and the People's Liberation Army (PLA)). Xi has reinforced its role and importance.

In essence, the united front strategy identifies the 'main enemy' and seeks to move other parties from a position of amity or alliance with the main enemy to one of neutrality, or from a position of neutrality to the CCP's side. In the early days, the Nationalist Party (Guomindang) was the main enemy. Now it is the US. The democratic allies of the US are to be pressured, persuaded, or otherwise induced not to take sides, or preferably, to align more closely with the PRC. 'Divide and rule' is a favoured tactic – a good example of the united front strategy 'peeling away' opposition is the CCP's cultivation of Hungary. Smaller countries, particularly in the so-called 'Global South', of which Xi declares the PRC to be a part, are to be detached from any past adherence or reliance on the US.⁹

⁹ Xi Jinping, Speech: 'Building a Just World of Common Development: Remarks by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China On Fight Against Hunger and Poverty At Session I of the 19th G20 Summit Rio de Janeiro', *Xinhua*, 18/11/2024, <https://english.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



4.0 A new world order: Chinese methods and manifestations

The CCP's foreign policy architecture is in essence the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, supported by three later initiatives: the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI). There is a strong element of slogan over substance – the party recognises that good external propaganda, to which it devotes enormous resources, can magnify concrete actions and policies – but nevertheless, under the banner of these four initiatives, the CCP has poured considerable resources into other countries. Understandably, it has done so in pursuit of its own interests – for example, to obtain necessary energy, minerals, food and other resources, to get hold of science and technology, or to develop new markets – but it has also benefitted third countries, even if its propaganda overplays those benefits. It may not necessarily have outspent the US or the European Union (EU) in a particular third country's development or aid, but it often succeeds in giving that impression (a fine example is the World Health Organisation (WHO), where the PRC has had an outsized influence compared to the small donations it makes – less than Bill Gates and less than many European countries). Money persuades and comparatively small amounts may be sufficient to bring onto the PRC's side some of the smaller nations.

To realise the united front strategy and to shift countries along the path from supporters of the main enemy to neutrality or, better, to support the PRC, the CCP employs eight main methods.

4.1 Portraying Beijing as the leader of the Global South

A connection with developing countries is phrased in deliberate contrast to the US. A typical example was an article in the *China Daily* in November 2023, authored by Liu Jianchao, Head of the International Liaison Department of the CCP (a more powerful body in international relations than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC (MFA):



The few traditional powers which have dominated the right to set the international agenda and rules have always put their own interests first. Their hegemonic, domineering and bullying practices have disturbed the normal international order and undermined international justice and fairness. Under the new circumstances, more and more Global South countries have realised the ideological and institutional yoke of imperialism and colonialism. And they are more determined than ever to seek strategic autonomy, practice true multilateralism, and promote greater democracy in international relations.¹⁰

In its 'Outlook on China's Foreign Policy on Its Neighbourhood In the New Era', published a month earlier, the MFA uses the CCP's attack vocabulary to describe 'two opposite propositions and trends concerning the future of Asia'.¹¹ Phrases such as 'true multilateralism', 'cold war mentality', 'exclusive clubs', 'draw lines based on values', 'politicise economic issues' and 'security blocs' are aimed at pointing a contrast between Chinese and American behaviour. Beijing is portrayed as working hand in hand with the interests of Global South countries.

No member of the Global South is too small or too wayward to be overlooked. While Xi has not travelled abroad nearly as frequently as in his first five-year term, he nevertheless personally meets all the many leaders who go to Beijing. It is a powerful tactic in the CCP's efforts to bring to its side smaller nations. Each country has a vote in the United Nations (UN) or in other global organisations. Their support for the CCP's worldview and its attempts to rework the world order at the expense of the interests of the US is the overriding concern. Nor is the CCP swayed from its purpose by the behaviour of other regimes. In September 2023, Xi and Bashar Al-Assad, former President of Syria, jointly announced a PRC-Syria strategic partnership.¹² In January 2024 the PRC was the first country to welcome a Taliban-appointed ambassador.¹³

¹⁰ Liu Jianchao, 'Working together to build a modern Global South', *People's Daily*, 09/11/2023, <http://en.people.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹¹ 'Outlook on China's Foreign Policy on Its Neighborhood In the New Era', Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China, 24/10/2023 (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹² 'Xi, Assad jointly announce China-Syria strategic partnership', *Xinhua*, 22/09/2023, <https://english.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹³ Akmal Dawi, 'China's President Accepts Credentials From Afghan Representative', *Voice of America*, 31/01/2024, <https://www.voanews.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



4.2 Reforming existing global governance structures to include an anti-US bias

The CCP sees the UN as a construct of the West, set up at a time when its influence and values were unchallenged; now outdated following the rise of other powers, it requires reform. To that end, the PRC has sought to get more of its officials in positions of power within international organisations, to change the narrative (e.g. on human rights, to align concepts more with the CCP view), and to have a say in new mechanisms being set up to deal with emerging issues, such as space, the poles or artificial intelligence. Calls for change are reasonable for a rising power. But as ever, anti-Americanism is never far below the surface. The September 2023 ‘Proposal of the People’s Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance’ simply could not abstain from pejorative references to the US, such as:

Certain countries must not erode the governance of new frontiers with their hegemonic mentality, overstretch the concept of national security and build “small yards with high fences” with their advantage in science and technology.¹⁴

4.3 Building alternate structures

Beyond reforming existing international organisations, the CCP has been assiduous in promoting the establishment of new ones which represent a different focus from existing Euro-Atlantic dominated bodies in political, security, economic and financial fields. The BRICS grouping, seen as a rival to the Group of Seven (G7), is the prime example. It held its first summit in 2009 and has now expanded from the original four countries to nine, with others having observer status. When the BRICS countries held a security dialogue with countries from the Global South, an MFA report listed the attendance of representatives from 13 other countries.¹⁵ A meeting in September 2024

¹⁴ ‘Proposal of the People’s Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance’, *Xinhua*, 13/09/2023, <https://english.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹⁵ ‘金砖国家同“全球南方”国家举行安全事务高级代表对话会’ [‘BRICS countries hold dialogue with high-level representatives on security affairs with countries of the Global South’], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People’s Republic of China, 12/09/2024 <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



revealed Beijing's geopolitical aims in promoting BRICS, as Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the PRC, declared that:

The BRICS countries should also promote the establishment of a more just and reasonable internet governance system reflecting the will and interests of most countries, achieving resource sharing, joint responsibility, and cooperative governance, and ensuring the sharing of digital dividends.¹⁶

In the economic and financial sphere, the PRC has led in setting up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank. Primarily focussing on security, but also economic cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) now has ten members. It has expanded from the PRC, Russia and several Central Asian countries to include India, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus. Other countries in Asia and the Middle East are dialogue partners.

These organisations not only stand as alternate magnets to the free and open international order, but they are also used by Beijing in its struggle with the US. In July 2024, Xi warned the SCO to 'resist external interference', to stand united and to be alert because 'members faced a joint "threat" from the Cold War mindset'.¹⁷ Xi did not mention the US, but his meaning was clear.

4.4 Characterising the US as a menace on the world stage

America is cast as a menace either directly or indirectly, by an implied contrast with the PRC's own approach to foreign relations. A fine example of the former is a commentary carried by *Xinhua*, the CCP's media arm, in early September 2023. Entitled 'America's bullying tactics for global hegemony', it asserted that American tactics were incessant and boiled down to suppression, containment and defamation.¹⁸ It accused the US of looting and war, pushing for 'decoupling', which was no different from 'de-risking', and 'using

¹⁶ 'China advocates BRICS enhancing counter-terrorism, cybersecurity cooperation, says Wang Yi', *Xinhua*, 12/09/2024, <https://english.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹⁷ Zhao Ziwen, 'Xi Jinping warns SCO to "resist external interference" in latest veiled swipe at US', *South China Morning Post*, 04/07/2024, <https://www.scmp.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

¹⁸ Zhang Kaiwei and Liang Jun, 'Commentary: America's bullying tactics for global hegemony', *People's Daily*, 05/09/2023, <http://en.people.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



cards such as religion, democracy, human rights and national security, to cover up its hegemonic pursuits and illicit deeds.’

According to the CCP, the US and its allies have a ‘colonial mentality’ – an accusation with a strong appeal to many former colonies – and form blocs and alliances to the detriment of those not included. By contrast, the CCP emphasises its concept of ‘building a community with a shared future for mankind’ and does not indulge in alliances or building blocs. The CCP contrasts its attempts to seek peace in the Middle East or Ukraine – in reality, little more than a series of generalised precepts or aspirations – with American responsibility for causing the outbreak of war or fanning its flames (one commentary from February 2024 was headed ‘The United States “mediates” Middle East peace: “The arsonist” poses as “the firefighter”’).¹⁹ Another typical example came when Wang met Sergey Lavrov, his Russian counterpart, in April 2024:

China and Russia must take a clear-cut stand on the side of historical progress, on the side of fairness and justice: oppose all acts of hegemony, tyranny and bullying; oppose Cold War thinking and separatist provocations; and actively push for the construction of a common future for all humankind.²⁰

In light of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the PRC’s support for Moscow, the hypocrisy is jaw breaking.

4.5 Aligning with Russia and countries which oppose the US

Although countries such as Russia, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela threaten an international order from which the PRC has greatly benefitted, the CCP works on the principle that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’. Despite the fact that support for Russia harms relations with the EU, the refrain from meetings between Chinese and Russian leaders has been a steady reaffirmation that the relationship and cooperation will only get stronger. ‘Beijing and Moscow will continue to

¹⁹ Ji Ze and Li Jun, ‘美国“斡旋”中东和平: “纵火犯”扮成“消防员”’ [‘US “mediates” peace in the Middle East: “Arsonist” disguised as “firefighters”’], *Xinhua*, 08/02/2024, <http://www.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

²⁰ Richard Parry, ‘China and Russia strengthen military ties in face of “bullying” West’, *The Times*, 09/04/2024, <https://www.thetimes.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



strengthen strategic co-operation on the world stage and provide each other with strong support,' Wang said during his April meeting with his opposite number.²¹ Xi has met Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, around 50 times. During a recent visit he declared that, '...I firmly believe that the deep friendship between China and Russia for generations will not change...and the responsibility of a major country to help the world and the people will not change', adding that the two countries 'explored a correct way for neighbouring major powers to coexist without forming alliances, engaging in confrontation or targeting third parties.'²² A none too subtle dig at the US.

4.6 Accusing the US of interference in regional affairs and of being an unreliable ally

If, in CCP eyes, the US is a menace to peace and order, which applies above all in the South China Sea. In August 2024, Wu Qian, Director of the Information Bureau of the Ministry of National Defence, described the US as 'the biggest black hand stirring up the situation in the South China Sea and the biggest destroyer of peace and stability in the South China Sea'.²³ The CCP describes Taiwan as 'the core of core interests' and is determined to exercise full control over all waters of the South China Sea within its so-called 'nine dash line', including sandbanks and islets far closer to the Philippines than to the PRC. It decries strong American support for Taiwan and its military treaty with the Philippines. The stakes are enormous if the CCP were to overplay its hand and find itself in direct conflict with American forces. Equally, if the CCP achieves its regional aims and can show that the US is not prepared to risk war with the PRC over Taiwan or the Philippines, it will have gone a long way to discredit the US as a reliable ally, unwilling to fulfil mutual defence pledges.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Victoria Bela, 'Xi and Putin vow stronger China-Russia cooperation for "fair world order" at Brics summit', *South China Morning Post*, 13/10/2024, <https://www.scmp.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

²³ Wu Qian, '国防部：忍耐是有限度的，菲方应立即从仙宾礁撤船撤人' ['Ministry of National Defense: Patience is limited, the Philippines should immediately withdraw its ships and personnel from Xianbin Reef'], *Guancha*, 29/08/2024, <https://www.guancha.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



4.7 De-dollarisation

The CCP's desire to move away from reliance on the US dollar as the main currency for trade and finance is long standing. It was given added impetus by sanctions imposed on Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and by the exclusion of Iran and Russia from dollar based global financial systems. Yet, the share of the Chinese yuan in global trade and financial transactions remains very small, even if it is growing. While growth will continue, it is unlikely that the yuan can make substantial inroads on dollar domination in the coming decades. Beijing will not run balance of payments deficits and is unlikely to open its capital account – the CCP cannot afford to give up control of major economic and financial decisions, and ceding control is not in its DNA. Calls to set up a BRICS based currency are also unrealistic, given the widely diverging economies and interests of the group, although the discussion among members about using a digital currency system of the sort sponsored by the Bank of International Settlements could eventually lead to changes in the global financial architecture. Yet for all its anti-American rhetoric, the CCP is likely to be cautious in its geoeconomic behaviour: the costs of losing access to the dollar system are vast compared to those suffered by Russia, which has never been closely integrated into global trade and finance.

4.8 Denigrating the US and its systems

The CCP uses its extensive propaganda machinery to weaken the appeal of the US to both domestic and international audiences. It portrays American democracy as seriously flawed, inferior to the PRC's own 'whole process people's democracy', as it terms its own political system, which it says genuinely works for and empowers the people. According to *Xinhua*, American systemic flaws include 'rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering, and the outsized influence of corporate interests in electoral politics'. These shortcomings have eroded public trust in the democratic process and undermined the legitimacy of American governance.²⁴ A March 2023 report entitled 'The state of American Democracy in 2022' by the MFA, also published in the *People's Daily*, along with other articles on American human rights

²⁴ Zhang Kaiwei and Zhong Wenxing, 'Commentary: Washington's stubborn pursuit of camp confrontation in a multi-polar world', *People's Daily*, 18/03/2024, <http://en.people.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



violations, gives the flavour. Its chapters attack political polarisation, money politics, skewed freedom of speech, a judicial system which ignores the public, as well as America's poor behaviour abroad.²⁵

Other commentaries covered subjects such as domestic extremism, the proliferation of firearms, racism, the rise in homelessness, drug abuse, gun violence, the widening wealth gap, and more. As a *People's Daily* commentary summed up:

The US not only fails to address its own flaws in freedom, democracy, and human rights but also privatises, politicises, and weaponises these universal pursuits of all humanity. The true intentions behind the American “double standards” are well understood by the world.²⁶

In sum, the CCP depicts the US as lawless and violent. Therefore, it has no right to criticise the PRC.

Despite Xi's famous dictum that ‘east, west, south, north, the party controls all’, it cannot oversee every transaction in the PRC's foreign relations. Other players – state-owned and private companies, organisations and individuals – have their own interests and aspirations. Nor are they all focussed on implementing the united front strategy or central directives. Nevertheless, a defined framework is in place and the CCP has been steadily tightening its control and oversight of organisations, companies, party members and ordinary citizens, while also limiting unsupervised interactions with foreigners.

²⁵ ‘The State of Democracy in the United States: 2022’, *China Daily*, 21/03/2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

²⁶ Gao Wen Cheng, ‘说一套做一套无法取信于人 – 起底美国政治 “形象赤字”’ [‘Saying one thing and doing another does not win people's trust – revealing the “image deficit” of American politics’], *Xinhua*, 18/03/2024, <http://www.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



5.0 A consideration of the past few years of US-PRC relations and of the future

5.1 Relations hit rock bottom

Relations between the PRC and the US reached their nadir in the period from summer 2022 and November 2023, a result of increased Chinese assertiveness, technology theft, hacking and espionage, unfair trade practices, American reconsideration of the threat posed by a rising PRC, and the imposition of sanctions and tariffs. Chinese behaviour over the cause of Covid-19 and the spy balloon incident at the start of 2023 did not help. The CCP reacted most strongly to the visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, the first by a speaker in 25 years. It cancelled theatre-level military talks, and cooperation over climate change, fentanyl and transnational crime. Between November 2022 and November 2023, there were no calls or meetings between Xi and Joe Biden, former President of the US.

The levels of vitriol from the CCP were constantly high. A MFA paper from May 2023 entitled 'America's Coercive Diplomacy and Its Harm' epitomises the party's line. It accused the US of using coercive diplomacy against developing countries (including Venezuela, Cuba, Myanmar, Syria, Russia, North Korea and Iran), of violating the principles of fair trade with its tariffs and sanctions, economic coercion through the US dollar, 'long-arm jurisdiction' (application of extraterritorial law), military pressure, intensifying division and antagonism in the international community, and a raft of other crimes.²⁷

²⁷ 'America's Coercive Diplomacy and Its Harm', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, 18/05/2023, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



5.2 A small improvement since 2023 – but from a low base

The two countries' leaders met after a break of a year in November 2023 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in San Francisco. The groundwork for a thaw had been laid earlier – mainly by the Americans – with a succession of visits and meetings by top officials. Jake Sullivan, former National Security Advisor, met Wang (May); Antony Blinken, former Secretary of State, met Xi in Beijing (June); Janet Yellen, former Treasury Secretary (July), John Kerry, former Special Envoy for Climate, (July), Gina Raimondo, former Secretary of Commerce, (August); Sullivan and Wang met again in Malta (September).²⁸

Beijing saw the need to improve relations, perhaps in consequence of a weakening economy. After the two leaders met in San Francisco, the Chinese foreign affairs machinery began to talk of the 'San Francisco vision' – a propaganda phrase eschewed by the US. The 'vision' is vague – as are many CCP initiatives and agreements. Xi defined it as 'jointly developing a right perception, jointly managing disagreements effectively, jointly advancing mutually beneficial cooperation, jointly shouldering responsibilities as major countries, and jointly promoting people-to-people exchanges.'²⁹

In more concrete terms, the sum of détente added up to a return to a low level functioning of mechanisms which had existed before the falling out: the resumption of high-level contacts and meetings; cooperation on counter-narcotics (centred on the PRC's supply of the chemical precursors for fentanyl); restoration of theatre-level military communications; talks on climate change, repatriation of illegal immigrants and the risks of artificial intelligence; and consultations on international and regional hotspot issues, including the Middle East, Ukraine and the Korean Peninsula.

Since November 2023, the level of vitriol in pronouncements on America has dropped, but it is never far from the surface. And the CCP continues to push ahead with the eight actions to undermine the US catalogued above. However, in July 2024, the CCP called off arms control talks with the US in protest at weapon sales to Taiwan. The MFA

²⁸ 'The Future of US-China Relations', Council on Foreign Relations, 30/01/2024, <https://www.cfr.org/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

²⁹ 'Xi meets US secretary of state', *Xinhua*, 26/04/2024, <https://english.news.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



declared that, ‘Washington must respect Beijing’s core interests if communication is to continue.’³⁰ At the end of the September 2024 visit to Beijing by Sullivan – the first by a US National Security Advisor for eight years – the *People’s Daily*’s assessment was downbeat:

On questions related to economic, trade and technological issues, the South China Sea and Ukraine, the US side is still stuck in its old-fashioned mentality and rhetoric. Also, its misconceptions concerning China and its mentality of seeking absolute security and absolute advantage remain unresolved. It really needs to behave in a manner that is conducive to regional peace and stability, while refraining from smearing, scapegoating or shifting the blame onto China.³¹

While working level meetings continue, when the CCP sees more value in signalling than substance, it cancels meetings of senior leaders. For example, the US expressed disappointment at the refusal of the Chinese defence minister to meet his American opposite number at the November 2024 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) defence ministers.³²

5.3 The future of US-PRC relations

It is difficult to conceive that Trump will change the overall direction of policy towards the PRC. The technology war will not abate, nor will trade frictions disappear as long as Beijing continues to export its overcapacity. Trump will surely impose the tariffs he has threatened, whether at 60% or a lower figure. He might – or might not – be more accommodating over Taiwan. But equally, he could put greater emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region rather than Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic.

But wherever the unpredictability of Trump takes American policy, the CCP’s united front strategy will proceed in the same direction as in the last decade. America remains the main enemy and ‘struggle’ is deemed necessary to achieve the ‘second centennial goal’.

³⁰ Sylvie Zhuang, ‘China calls off arms control talks with US over weapon sales to Taiwan’, *South China Morning Post*, 17/07/2024, <https://www.scmp.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

³¹ Zhang Kaiwei and Zhong Wenxing, ‘Commentary: Finding right course for China-US relations with right strategic perception’, *People’s Daily*, <http://en.people.cn/> (checked: 20/01/2025).

³² Jintmas Sakornchai, ‘US defence chief regrets China’s decision not to meet during Southeast Asian security talks’, 21/11/2024, <https://apnews.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



The party may at times modulate its rhetoric and seek to play on Trump's skittishness, but the underlying tune will remain the same. The eight methods of opposing the US and changing the world order listed in this report will continue to be the basis of the CCP's foreign policy.

This means that the CCP will continue efforts to decouple – or to de-risk (the CCP has declared that there is no difference between the words). Decoupling was a Chinese policy well before the concept took hold in North America and Europe. The 2015 'Made in China 2025' policy, the 'dual circulation' policy (in essence, domestic wherever possible, foreign only where necessary), the 'new development model', the long insistence on self-sufficiency are decoupling.

There will be no let-up in the technology war. As Mei Hongyong, a Director of the BGI Group (a leading Chinese technology company), and formerly an official at the Ministry of Science and Technology, said in December 2024:

The core of the US-China rivalry is the technology war...Many people talk about financial and trade wars, but the deadliest battle is the technology war. The technology war will ultimately determine the fate of both sides. Whether the US can defeat China or whether China can rise from adversity will depend on the technology war...I also believe that the technology war is not an encounter battle, but protracted.³³

The three regional potential flashpoints – Taiwan, the Philippines and the South and East China seas – will continue to cause tensions and disagreements. While war is unlikely, because it would lead to 'mutually assured destruction' of both sides' economies (and the global economy), the CCP will do as much as possible to end American influence in the region, by taking actions aimed at showing its weakness and unreliability as an ally. There is room for miscalculation, leading to more severe consequences than intended. More broadly, the growth of the PRC's nuclear arsenal, its development of increasingly sophisticated weaponry, its interest in the military uses of space, as well as moves in other spheres are not conducive to global peace. Xi's oft-spoken phrase about Chinese 'peaceful genes' is another example

³³ Yuxuan Jia and Andy Han, 'BGI's Mei Yonghong on China's past, present, & future in science & technology', *The East is Read*, 21/12/2024, <https://www.eastisread.com/> (checked: 20/01/2025).



where rhetoric and reality part company. And the CCP will continue to strengthen its alliance-in-all-but-name with Russia.



6.0 What might PRC-US relations mean for Britain and Europe?

A relatively new appearance in CCP terminology is ‘America and the West’ [美西方]. Europe, Australia, Japan, India and others are seen as part of a bloc which upholds the old unfair and unjust world order. As allies of the ‘main enemy’, they must be detached from their traditional adherence to America by a mixture of sticks and carrots, depending how the CCP judges their vulnerabilities at any particular moment; by the judicious application of ‘divide and rule’; by interference and propaganda; and by the mobilisation of individuals’ interests, witting or unwitting, within these countries.

In the case of the United Kingdom (UK), the CCP is currently waiting to see what strategy the new Labour government pursues. Labour is committed to a full ‘China audit’, a process which has been delayed but will need to be completed in time for the multi-year Spending Review, also delayed, perhaps until June or July. Whether the audit will lead to the articulation of a clear China strategy, the absence of which in the past the Labour Party berated the Conservative government, is moot. The signs are that what emerges is likely to be a ‘fudge’, a compromise between those who believe that closer cooperation with Beijing will benefit the UK economy and those who are more concerned by the CCP’s geopolitical ambitions and actions. That will satisfy neither side within the UK, nor the US or the PRC. Both will bring pressure to bear. Trump and Elon Musk, his new close adviser and Administrator of the Department of Government Efficiency, are unlikely to tolerate an ambiguous British stance. Given the UK’s close ties to the US, the PRC will lose out, but quite probably after an unhelpful (not least to business) period of ambiguity.

In the EU context, the CCP sees that the European Commission takes a harsher line than some individual countries. It therefore devotes considerable resources at the national level to widen divisions in policy. Within individual countries, provinces and cities may be easier to influence than national level organisations or central governments. Business interests may be at odds with security interests (Chinese connected vehicle imports and manufacture in Europe, for example). At lower levels, ‘people to people’ relations are important to the CCP because they too can advance party aims or undermine national



protection strategies, for example, in the fields of technology cooperation between universities and research institutes.

As the ‘struggle’ between the PRC and US continues, UK and EU relations with Beijing will oscillate as the CCP uses both carrots and sticks. Europe is not without cards it can play. It is a massively important market for the PRC; its technology, innovation and intellectual property are needed; and its companies are not American, so they may be favoured over US companies. But to secure their future, Britain and the EU must act in coordination and unity, they must better protect their technology and give greater priority to economic security and to national security – the idea that economic interests and national security can be kept separate is past its sell-by date.

European countries will increasingly have to take sides, to support the free and open international order and to align with the US or it will be forced to accept a very different world under the leadership of Xi and the CCP. If that seems too stark a proposition, a better understanding of the true meaning of the CCP’s ‘second centennial goal’ and the methods through which Xi hopes to reach it might bring home its reality.



About the author

Charles Parton is Chief Advisor to the China Observatory and a Distinguished Fellow at the Council on Geostrategy.



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The Council on Geostrategy is an independent non-profit organisation situated in the heart of Westminster. We focus on an international environment increasingly defined by geopolitical competition and the environmental crisis.

Founded in 2021 as a Company Limited by Guarantee, we aim to shape British strategic ambition in a way that empowers the United Kingdom to succeed and prosper in the twenty-first century. We also look beyond Britain's national borders, with a broad focus on free and open nations in the Euro-Atlantic, the Indo-Pacific, and Polar regions.

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This Report is part of the Council on Geostrategy's China Observatory. The China Observatory seeks to watch, monitor and evaluate the evolution, behaviour and actions of the Chinese Communist Party. Together with experts and legislators, the Observatory aims to guide HM Government in the formulation of a coherent 'China policy' through research-led, non-partisan analysis from a British vantage point.



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Address: 14 Old Queen Street, Westminster, London, SW1H 9HP

Phone: 020 3915 5625

Email: info@geostrategy.org.uk

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