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The US China Policy under Trump: Change in Continuity

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Abstract

This article seeks to look at the possible changes and continuities in the US China policy under the Trump administration. In a brief review of US China policy since 1972 up to 2016, it shows that the US China policy under succeeding administrations has been a combination of cooperation and confrontation. Under Trump whose stated view of China suggests a strong desire to push back China, political tensions between Washington and Beijing will possibly arise. Trump's policy on China will be more confrontational with the employment of protectionist and hard-line measures. In four years to come, the US will be under a new administration but the US national interests, namely US security and prosperity, do not change. Also, the US-China relationship is too big to fall. Therefore, the Trump administration will seek to effectively engage with China while pursuing a hard-line policy with China. A grand bargain seems to better serve the US national interest than a battle with China. Hence, it is expected that the US China policy under Trump will be a change in continuation.

Keywords: Trump administration, US China policy, confrontation, cooperation, engagement, China.

Introduction

A new era in the US-China relations seems to begin with significant changes under the Trump administration in the years to come. With a tougher policy stance on China and a strong will to "Make America Great Again," Trump has introduced enormous uncertainty in US foreign policy towards China. Employing documentary research and historical approach as the main research methodology, this article seeks to demonstrate the possible changes and underline the continuities in the US China policy under the Trump presidency. It will begin with a brief historical review of the US policy towards China from Nixon to Obama to form a foundation for deeply analysing the trajectory of US policy to China under the Trump presidency. It goes on to discuss how Trump will likely deal with China in trade/economics and security, the two areas that both the US and China have concerned the most. It shows how likely Trump will change the strategy of containment with accommodation, underwritten by previous US presidents, Republican and Democrat, to manage China's rise. It will also point out that despite his strong desire to push back China, Trump will see that a grand bargain seems to better serve the US national interest than a battle with China. The Trump administration might weave a new thread in the fabric of US-China relations. However, certain established patterns would remain unchanged even in the historical turning point in US policy towards China under Trump.

US China Policy in Historical Perspectives

As Keith Middlemas, a prominent English historian, wrote “Without contemporary history, studies in the contemporary world - by political scientists, lawyers, economists, or specialists in international relations - rest on a dangerously relative foundation, and students are faced with a blind spot for the ‘years not taught.’” In the modern time, the United States remains a dominant player on the world stage, and China, though having achieved significant goals, is still in the process of developing, understanding the historical milestones between the two nations will constitute a sturdier intellectual basis for us to explain current dynamics in world politics in general and in the US-China relationship in particular. The history of US policy towards China from Nixon to Obama is valuable not just for its historic perspective on US foreign policy and China but also for the guidance it implies to Asian peace and security.

From Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan: Opening to China

Before 1979, there had been no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China. In 1949, the Nationalist Government, officially known as the National Government of the Republic of China, was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party forces in the Chinese Civil War and was eliminated from mainland China. The Chinese Communist Party founded the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. For the next three decades, the United States continued to recognize the Nationalist Government in Taiwan as the sole legal government over all of China and had intermittent communication with the People’s Republic of China through special mechanisms, namely the Sino-U.S. Ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, Poland which lasted from August 1955 to February 1970.

The United States sought to write a new and important chapter in the history of the US relationship with China under the Nixon administration. *In his article entitled “Asia after Vietnam” published in Foreign Affairs in October 1967*, Richard Nixon once expressed “We simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbours” (Nixon, 1967). After the 1968 presidential election resulted in Richard Nixon’s ascendancy to the White House, the new president again demonstrated the same stance on China in his foreign policy agenda. In his inaugural address on January 20, 1969, President Richard Nixon sent an important message: the United States was prepared to embark on “an era of negotiation” with the communist China. This declaration signalled the change of emphasis in US foreign policy: The Nixon administration desired to focus on the relaxation in its relations with China. In order to fulfil their promise to shift the Cold War landscape from an “era of confrontation” to an “era of negotiations,” President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger set up a back channel for direct communication with China as the President believed that this rapprochement “should be done privately and should under no circumstances get into the public prints from this direction” (Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Kissinger). This new channel also ignored the traditional diplomacy which was regularly carried out through the foreign services and overseas embassies. President Nixon’s viewpoint on China was arguably the starting point of forty years of US active engaging with China. Under successive US presidencies, the United States, while seeking to hedge against China’s rapidly-growing economic, political and military power, has expected that China would someday fully integrate itself into the liberal international order.

President Gerald Ford followed Nixon’s policy approach to China and sought to improve the US-China relations. Like President Nixon, President Ford held that it was crucial for the United States to build a more constructive relationship with China. In his official visit as the US President to China in December 1975, Ford pointed it out: In the Shanghai Communique, our two governments recognized that “there are essential difference between China and the United States in their social systems and foreign policies.” But, more importantly, we also agreed, that normalization of relations would be in the mutual interest of our peoples, and would contribute to the development of a more secure international order. We, therefore, established certain principles to guide the growth of our relations and our approach to the international scene (Ford, 1975).

The Ford administration showed its will to improve relations with China and considered normalization with China as a bold and farsighted move. The Ford administration even occasionally put forth that the United States would be committed to defending China against the Soviet Union. For instance, on October 18 1976 in a news conference at Harvard University,

Secretary of State Kissinger publicly stated that “the territorial integrity and sovereignty of China is very important to the world equilibrium, and we would consider it a grave matter if this were threatened by outside power” (Kissinger cited in Ross, 1993). Kissinger’s reassurance of the US defense of China regarding a threat against China from the Soviet Union created the impression that there could be US-China security cooperation.

When Jimmy Carter took the White House in 1977, the United States and China had almost reached agreement on normalization. On January 1, 1979 President Carter officially announced that the United States would recognize the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and establish official diplomatic relations with China. *On the same day, China announced the similar recognition to the United States. This was a historic moment in the US-China relations. After long and serious negotiations begun by the Nixon administration in 1972 and continued by the Ford administration, the Carter administration officially recognize the Chinese Communist Party as the sole legal authority of China and demonstrated the US willingness to cooperate with China for the interests of the Americans, the Chinese and the world peace and security. President Carter believed that normalisation of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China would “contribute to the welfare of the American people, to the stability of Asia where the United States has major security and economic interest, and to the peace of the entire world” (Carter, 1978).*

Like Nixon and Ford, President Jimmy Carter saw the increasingly important role that China would play in world politics. A weak and divided China would become a focal point of great power competition. In other words, a weak and divided China would be detrimental to global stability. With a view that “As a nation of gifted people who comprise one-fourth of the population of the earth, China plays an important role in world affairs - a role that can only grow more important in the years ahead,” the Carter administration continued to carry forward the US China policy approach initiated in 1972. The Carter administration normalised relations with China clearly indicated the US recognition of the Chinese Communist Party as the only government that had been able to keep China as a unified and independent nation. In his speech at *the U.S.-China Relations Forum in Atlanta in November 2013, Carter reaffirmed his recognition of Chinese political system: We have different cultures; we have different environmental problems, challenges, and opportunities; we have different geographies; we have different alliances next door to us that are very precious to us; and we have a different political system. These things are inherent, and they are not going to change. We are not going to change a political system (Carter, 2013).*

The Carter administration’s announcement of diplomatic normalisation with China had completed the process of opening to China begun in 1972 by the Nixon administration.

The Reagan administration (1981-1989) continued to take positive steps in the direction of accommodating China (Oksenberg, 1982). For example, on the issue of Taiwan, China had a list of commands to the Reagan administration including termination of arms sales to Taiwan, explicit recognition of and respect to China’s sovereignty over Taiwan, abolition or at least revision of the Taiwan Relations Act, removal of Taiwan from the Asian Development Bank among the others. From Hsiung’s observations, the Reagan administration “conceded to most of these commands and to some quite promptly” (Hsiung, 1984). The most accommodative step that the Reagan administration had made in upgrading relations with China was the United States-China Joint Communiqué on United States Arms Sales to Taiwan, widely known as the August 17 Communiqué. The Communiqué demonstrated Washington’s effort to deal with US arms sales to Taiwan in a view to preventing the disruption of US-China relationship. The Reagan administration asserted in the August 17 Communiqué that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution (Kan, 2006: 41).

Also, the August 17 Communiqué stated that The United States Government attaches great importance to its relations with China, and reiterates that it has no intention of fringing on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, or interfering in China's internal Affairs, or pursuing a policy of “two China,” or “one China, one Taiwan” (Kan, 2006: 41).

After the release of the August 17 Communiqué, President Reagan publicly stated that “We will not interfere in this matter or prejudice the free choice of or put pressure on the people of Taiwan in this matter. At the same time, we have an abiding interest and concern that any resolution be peaceful” ([The White House, 1982](#)). His very last sentence highlighted Washington’s position. Taiwan issue was the internal affairs of the Chinese and this issue had to be peacefully resolved. President Reagan’s successors also subscribed to this viewpoint regarding to Taiwan issue. For instance, President Clinton said “We don’t support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan, one China. And we don’t believe Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement” ([The White House, 1998](#)).

Indeed, the Reagan administration took various steps to establish a form of accommodation with China. The Reagan administration acknowledged the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and its one China policy. Different factors produced Reagan’s accommodation of China in the 1980s. Some were tactical while others were strategic. The first factor was unquestionably related to the China-Soviet Union dispute. The second factor was mainly a response to the Soviet expansion. Like in the preceding administrations, the Reagan administration realized that sustaining the US China policy of the 1950s and 1960s was strategically outdated and would be damaging to the US interest. The August 17 Communiqué reflected as consistence in US China policy under Reagan. That was to seek to cooperate with China and prevent the collapse of the US-China relations. Even before the publication of the August 17 Communiqué, President Reagan in regard to China’s claim of sovereignty over Taiwan made it clear to Beijing in his letter delivered by Vice President George Bush to Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping: “There is only one China. We will not permit the unofficial relations between the American people and the people of Taiwan to weaken our commitment to this principle” ([Hsiung, 1984: 194](#)). The Reagan administration’s continuation to cultivate the relations with China represented a convergent desire, in different U.S. administrations from 1972 to the end of the Cold War, to remove obstacles to good relations with China. The US effort to gradually stabilize the US-China relationship stemmed from the US acknowledgment of China’s global strategic importance. This was once put forth by Secretary of State Alexander Haig, “in the last quarter of the twentieth century, China may well be the most important country in the world” in terms of US long-term interests ([Haig, 1984](#)).

From George H. W. Bush to Barack Obama: Engaging with China

Since the end of the Cold War, the US-China relations have been largely constructive and endured some periods of deteriorations and confrontations. Even in its best phases, doubts and uncertainty still can be seen in the US-China relations. In reality, the post-Cold War administrations from George H. W. Bush to Clinton to George H. W. Bush and to Barack Obama have revised US China policy to limit the erosion of the US-China relations. The common desire of the post-Cold War US presidents is to preserve and promote positive relationship with China.

The first post-Cold War President of the United States, George H. W. Bush (1989-1993) sought to expand trade, cultural and scientific exchange with China with the hope that the relationship would thrive and both the Chinese and the Americans would benefit from positive developments in the US-China relations. These new developments in President George H. W. Bush’s view would help to deepen the US-China relations. Speaking at Beijing on February 25, 1989 President George H. W. Bush made it clear that the United States valued the new relations with China and asserted that the two countries needed to build up their relationship to deal with both areas of disagreement and mutual interest ([Bush, 1989a](#)). He reconfirmed that “there is but one China, we have found ways to address Taiwan constructively without rancor” ([Bush, 1989a](#)).

The George H. W. Bush administration’s greatest effort to maintain the fragile US-China relations could be seen in its response to the Tiananmen Square events in June 1989. President George H. W. Bush, despite his strong criticism of the Chinese government’s crackdown in Tiananmen Square ([Bush, 1989b](#)), still tried not to “jettison improved U.S.-Sino relations by overreacting to events. Many in Congress cried out for a harsh, punitive response to the Chinese government’s killing of peaceful protestors, but the Bush administration imposed only limited sanctions” ([Miller Center, 2016](#)). In the letter to Deng Xiaoping regarding the consequences of the Tiananmen Square events on the US-China relations, President George H. W. Bush with a heavy heart wrote: We must not let this important relationship suffer further. Please help me keep it strong. Any statement that could be made from China that drew from earlier statements about

peacefully resolving further disputes with protesters would be very well received here. Any clemency that could be shown the student demonstrators would be applauded world-wide. We must not let the aftermath of the tragic recent events undermine a vital relationship patiently built up over the past seventeen years. I would, of course, welcome a personal reply to this letter. This matter is too important to be left to our bureaucracies ([Bush & Scowcroft, 1999](#)).

The US China policy under Clinton was a successful combining of engagement and deterrence. The Clinton administration (1993-2001) knew that a confrontational policy to China would threaten the comprehensive relationship between Washington and Beijing. President Clinton and his team sought to keep China's rise from undermining US strategic interest without employing counterproductive strategy that might create irreconcilable differences or hostilities. The cornerstone of this effort was the Clinton's emphasis on the benefits of cooperation and the cost of confrontation in relations with China. The Clinton administration sought to effectively engage China into the world economic system with a view that a prosperous China would be beneficial not only to the Chinese but also the Americans and the world people. President Clinton stated in November 1993, after an informal meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin at a conference for Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders: "I think anybody should be reluctant to isolate a country as big as China with the potential China has for good" ([Whiteoutpress, 2016](#)) Furthermore, President Clinton decided to extend China's most-favored-nation (MFN) trade status. When being questioned by human rights groups and the Congress who were concerned about human rights in China, President Clinton said that the United States had to see its relations with China in a broader context than simply human rights and delink between trades from human rights ([Ann Devroy, 1994](#)). He believed that the United States will not "do more to advance the cause of human rights if China is isolated" ([Ann Devroy, 1994](#)). With that in mind, President Clinton decided to bring China into the World Trade Organization and signed into law a historic bill that granted China the status of permanent normal trade relations (*PNTR*). In a speech at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, President Clinton explained for his decision.

By joining the W.T.O., China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products; it is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values: economic freedom. The more China liberalizes its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people - their initiative, their imagination, their remarkable spirit of enterprise. And when individuals have the power, not just to dream but to realize their dreams, they will demand a greater say ([Clinton, 2000](#)).

While emphasizing on broad and constructive engagement with China, the Clinton administration made it plain to Beijing that US-China confrontations were costly and unnecessary. For example, when China conducted a series of military exercise near Taiwan and missile tests, the Clinton administration responded by the deployment of two carriers groups to the Taiwan Strait ([AFP, 2004](#)). The Clinton administration's show of force bolstered its deterrence posture. This strategy really worked well as it made clear to Beijing that US-China confrontations would be fraught with danger including negative impacts on Chinese strategic credibility in the Asian region and for the Chinese Communist Party's domestic legitimacy. Indeed, the Clinton administration showed Beijing that it would impose costs on any attempts to challenge US interests. The Clinton administration wanted China to understand that its actions would have consequences, and that challenging US credibility and commitments is not cost free. Thus, so long as the United States supported China's integration in the world economy and wanted to enhance cooperation with China, Beijing should compel Washington to use military forces.

Though repeatedly criticizing Clinton for not being able to take practical and effective measures in dealing with China, President George W. Bush's policy stance on China was similar to Clinton's. The way the Bush administration (2001-2008) handled China's rise was a continuation of Clinton's combination of engagement and deterrence. As under the Clinton presidency, the overarching goal of the George W. Bush's China policy was to engage with China and deter rising China from challenging US primacy. Many aspects of US China policy under the George W. Bush administration continued the trends shaped by President Clinton. Especially, after the September 11 attacks the Bush administration shifted to a cooperative and constructive engagement with China. There was a positive evolution of US-China relations under the George W. Bush years. The Bush administration, instead of using the term a "strategic competitor" ([Rice, 2000](#)) as Bush

defined China during his presidential campaign, described US-China relations as “candid, constructive and cooperative” (Dietrich, 2005: 214). This showed clearly that the Bush administration had regarded China as a strategic partner rather than a threat or challenge to the US primacy in the world. It was asserted in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America released in September 2002 that “We welcome the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China” and that “The United States relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region” (Bush, 2002). By seeing China’s rise as an opportunity for further cooperation rather than sources of confrontation between the United States and China, the George W. Bush administration showed its desire to deepen US engagement with China and to place the US-China partnership in a larger framework of cooperation (Przystup & Saunders, 2006).

The most indicative sign of US increased cooperation with China under George W. Bush presidential years was the Bush administration’s reaffirmation of its support for the one China policy. President Bush clearly stated that “the United States government’s policy is one China” ((Dietrich, 2005: 214). Secretary of State Colin Powell reiterated this policy stance in 2004 that “There is only one China. Taiwan is not independent. It does not enjoy sovereign ty as a nation, and that remains our policy, our firm policy” (Associated Press, 2004).

On the whole, the George W. Bush administration learnt that promoting cooperation with China and at the same time containing Chinese growing power would well serve the US interest. The United States and China have much common ground for promoting bilateral trade, preventing nuclear proliferation, combating terrorism and solving climate change (Zoellick, 2005). According to Secretary of State Collin Powell, during the Bush presidency “US relations with China are the best they have been since President Nixon’s first visit” (Associated Press, 2004) in 1972. Commenting on US-China relations, President Bush characterized the United States and China as “partners in diplomacy” (Sanger, 2003). The realization that the United States needed to regard China as a strategic partner, not as a strategic competitor helped of the George W. Bush administration to pursue a “comparatively successful” China policy.

With a good will in China, the Obama administration (2008-2016) has built on the legacy of the Bush-era China policy. President Obama has continued to increase cooperation with China while reinforcing US security commitment to its Asian allies. In spite of being wary of rising China as a partner, the Obama administration holds that Chinese growing economic and strategic significance by continuing to support China as a responsible player that both gains from and has a critical role in maintaining world peace and stability. The Obama administration invested much time and energy to expand and strengthen US-China ties to handle regional and global challenges more effectively, namely the goal to build a cooperative era with such would-be Asian powers as China and India (Steinberg, 2009; Clinton, 2010). In a quite similar language that the George W. Bush administration had used, the Obama administration expressed its willingness to build a “positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship” with Beijing that enabled the United States and China to work together for their mutual interests. For example, the Obama administration made great effort to engage China in dealing with such regional and global issues as North Korean nuclear program, Iranian nuclear ambition, climate change and the global financial crisis. The Obama administration placed an emphasis on the need to increase trade and economic cooperation through the bilateral US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED). In addition, the Obama administration sought to further military-to-military cooperation with China. The Obama administration highlighted the necessity of US-China military-to-military cooperation in the 2010 Pentagon report, “Sustainable and reliable US-China military-to-military ties are an important component of the overall bilateral US-China relationship and are necessary for the relationship to be comprehensive” (Department of Defense, 2010).

It is noted that from 2009 China has become more assertive, particularly in claiming its sovereignty in the China Seas. This was seen by the United States and regional countries as aggressiveness or unilateralism that might disturb the peace and stability in Asia. China’s growing assertiveness in the region made the Obama administration devise a clearer strategy to Asia that has been widely known as the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific (Bader, 2012 & Saunders, 2015). The Obama administration’s policy response to China’s assertiveness does not necessarily mean the United States and China are ripe for strategic competition. In fact, along with a clear policy approach that the United States will not tolerate anyone that challenges US credibility and

commitment in Asia, the Obama administration has demonstrated that the United States prefers to build up relations with China by increased cooperation on a wide range of areas from economics to politics to security and to global issues. This kind of great power relations (Hadley, 2014; Xinbo, 2014) based on cooperation rather than confrontation would enable Washington and Beijing to work together to constructively manage the potential threats to the US-China relations. As stated in a 2014 testimony on the future of US - China relations: ...we welcome the emergence of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. We believe all countries, and particularly emerging powers like China, should recognize the self-benefit of upholding basic rules and norms on which the international system is built; these are rules and norms which China has participated in formulating and shaping, and they are rules and norms that it continues to benefit from. In this context, we are encouraging China to exercise restraint in dealing with its neighbors and show respect for universal values and international law both at home and abroad (Russel, 2014).

Indeed, the US-China relations from Nixon (1972) to Obama (2016) can be best described as a mixture of cooperation and competition with a combination of important common and competing interests. The US China policy therefore has been justified and changed overtime to well serve the US interest. Under successive US administrations, Washington has been aware that confrontational US-China relations would be devastating to both sides. Henceforth, Washington has warned China that the cost of confronting with the United States is very high and unnecessary. The main point in the US China policy is to seek to construct mechanisms that can promote US-China relations for the shake of the Americans, the Chinese and the global community. The US China policy has worked well. The world since 1972 has witnessed a relatively stable US-China relationship. No one before 1972 could even imagine that the United States and China would someday become strategic partners. In truth, the US China policy of engaging with China and avoiding conflicts has form a basis for the US-China cooperation at the bilateral, regional, and global levels. It is a sustainable basis for the US and China to better deal with periods of crisis in their relations. Constructively and effectively managing differences in the US-China relations has been underpinned in US China policy since 1972.

Under Trump: Change in Continuity

When Trump takes office in January 2016, a significant change in relations between the United States and China seemed far from inevitable. Trump believed that Presidents before him had failed to protect US interest in making US policy to China. This section will demonstrate that Trump's pronouncements on China are arguably the starting point of four years of US hard-line policy to China. However, it will show that the Trump administration's China policy will not totally depart from the standard convention and precedent.

Trump's Stated View of China

On China, Trump called China "the great abuser of the United States" (Vinograd & Jaffe, 2016). He said that "We can't continue to allow China to rape our country," adding "That's what they're doing. It's the greatest theft in the history of the world" (Vinograd & Jaffe, 2016). Trump has seen China as a problem both in trade and in what this Asian country is doing in the South China Sea.

Regarding trade with China, Trump stressed the China has taken advantage of its membership in the World Trade Organisation to proper and Americans have been losing their jobs to the Chinese people. He said that the United States have lost 70,000 factories since China officially became a member of the World Trade Organization, and had a huge trade deficit (about \$500 billion dollar) with China (ChinaFiles, 2016). Trump also accused Beijing of currency manipulation and held that Chinese currency manipulation needed to be stopped as it has negatively affected the United States trade with China: "China, who's made a fortune with us, they make our products, they make our money, and they're fine" (ChinaFiles, 2016). He underlined that under Trump presidency, the United States would "stand up to China" and "stop the jobs from leaving" the United States (ChinaFiles, 2016). Indeed, Trump's announcements on trade with China were consistent with his major goal: "Negotiate fair trade deals that create American jobs, increase American wages, and reduce America's trade deficit" (Trump, 2016a). Trump's determination to deal with trade imbalance with China by taxing Chinese products and imposing a tariff on China as the Chinese, in his words, "do it to" the United States indicates that under the

Trump administration, the United States-China trade relations would be restructured in the way that is reasonably fair for the United States.

Referring to the South China Sea, Trump strongly criticized China's artificial island building and militarization in the South China Sea. In his view, the United States needed to counterbalance China's growing assertiveness and military power. He supported a hard-line to China as he supposed that the Obama administration had been too soft to China. In his speech at Jacksonville, Florida on November 3, 2016, Trump blamed the Obama administration for China's increased unilateralism in the South China Sea, saying that what China was doing in the South China Seas was "such a big violation" but China has "no respect for Obama", and no longer respects the United States (Donald Trump, 2016b). Trump once predicted that China would become an influential force in Asia at the expense of the United States (The Indian Express, 2016). In his speech on national security in September 2016, Trump had proposed to expand both the US Navy and Marines (Donald Trump, 2016c). He specifically said that the United States needed to increase the size of its Navy to 350 ships (Donald Trump, 2016c). Noticeably, Alexander Gray and Peter Navarro, two of Trump campaign advisers suggested in their essay published in Foreign Policy two days before the election that rising China needed to be contained by increasing U.S. military expenditure (Gray & Navarro, 2016). Rebuilding US military, in Trump's view, is vital to protect U.S. strategic interest.

Change: Protectionist and Hard-line Policy

As the US President, Trump will seek to reassess and redefine US policy to China and employ different methods to achieve the most important goal of US foreign policy: security and prosperity. Specifically, from his stated view of China, it is expected he would seek a grand bargain with China in trade/economics while being vigilant of China military power. In his plan to "Make America Great Again," Trump and his team would seek to prevent China's growing influence and to renegotiate trade deals with China in the way that Beijing might brand them as unfair and unilateral. Though Trump's policy to China is a story yet to be written, there would be substantively and symbolically significant changes in US-China relations under the Trump administration. The most profound changes in the US-China relations will likely be seen in the bilateral trade relations and in the security front.

Regarding trade and economics, a protectionist approach will be employed by the Trump administration in dealing with China. In reading Trump's 7-point plan to rebuild the U.S. economy by fighting for free trade and his presidential campaign announcements, we can see that trade protectionism would become a common tool in the world economy. Raising tariff, reducing imports, restricting quotas and increasing government subsidies would be used more often by the United States to compete with China. After many years enjoying huge trade surplus from the United States, China can be among the first nations a Trump-led United States demand to widen its market access (Global Times, 2016). If the United States cannot negotiate better trade deals with China, the Trump administration would seek to impose a heavy tariff on China.

Regarding security, a hard-line approach to China will apparently be used Trump and his team. Trump promised to build up U.S. conventional military power. He once put it forth that the United States used to be a rich country with very powerful military and huge capacity in various ways. Yet, the United States, in Trump's assessment, today have a severely depleted military and the U.S. nuclear arsenals are in really bad shape. Recently, Trump has revealed his plan to strengthen U.S. military presence in Asia. Rudy Giuliani, the president-elect's frontrunner for secretary of state, in his remarks to global business leaders in Washington on November 16, 2016 said that Washington would increase U.S. troops in the Asia Pacific to 550,000 instead of going down to 420,000 (Fernando, 2016). In addition, the U.S. Navy will be strengthened and expanded from 280 to 350 ships. In Rudy Giuliani's words, "At 350, China can't match us in the Pacific. [...] If you face them with a military that is modern, gigantic, overwhelming and unbelievably good at conventional and asymmetric warfare, they may challenge it, but I doubt it" (Fernando, 2016). Trump himself declared that "We want to deter, avoid and prevent conflict through our unquestioned military strength" (McLaughlin, 2016). Trump maintained that fostering the military will prepare the United States better for global threats. On Trump's plan to build up U.S. military, Adam Lockyer, security studies analyst at Macquarie University, Australia said the United States could possibly have "a lot more military muscle" under the Trump administration (Fernando,

2016). Apparently, the Trump administration will aim to consolidate US military to maintain its superior military strength to China in the Asia-Pacific region. *Hence, there is some real anxiety in China and in the Asia Pacific about what this is going to mean. The risk of the United States and China sliding into confrontation which ultimately involves regional countries seems very real.*

Continuity: Bargaining Better Than Battling

US administrations come and go. When a new administration comes, it brings with it new policies. However, US national interests have not changed from the beginning of its history. These unchanging national interests of the United States include US security and prosperity. In different periods of time, due to the changes in the circumstances, the methods to pursue these perennial national interests can be different. As stated by George Washington, "... the universal experience of mankind, that no nation is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interest; and no prudent statesman or politician will venture to depart from it" (Washington & Sparks, 2010: 110).

Like his predecessors, President Trump will see that confronting with China is a disaster to the US economy and security. He certainly will not be soft to China but he will also make great efforts to avoid wars of any kind with China. Despite his serious criticism of Obama's policy to China, Trump and his team will find it necessary to maintain many elements of Obama's China policy for US strategic interests. The general principles of Trump's foreign policy to China will base on what successive US administration has formed: constructive management of China's rise.

Indeed, Trump's China policy will pay more attention to the bilateral trade and the US military posture in Asia. This might result in the US-China relations beginning on a rocky footing. However, the Trump administration will gradually try to stabilize its relations with China as the US-China relationship is too big to fall. In that spirit, the first thing the Trump administration can do to maintain relatively stable US-China relationship is to provide a clear articulation of the continuation of the US China under his presidency. By showing the US willingness to negotiate with China in trade and cooperate with China in maintaining world security, the Trump administration will avoid the potential danger of putting the political and military bilateral relations at stake. Positive and constructive developments in US-China relationship rather than political tensions and trade protectionism are what Asia and the world expect to see. This means that the Trump administration will need to set realistic expectations in its relations with Beijing.

There have been ups and downs in the US-China relations since the normalization of their diplomatic relations. However, they have been able to work together to address and manage differences. Security and prosperity are the unchanging national interests of the United States throughout its history. As maintaining good relations with China is doubtlessly critical to US security and prosperity, the Trump administration will try not to see itself in a battle with China. This has been clearly stated by **James Woolsey, Trump's a senior adviser on national security, defence and intelligence.**

Our ideological differences should also be better managed. America's commitment to the spread of freedom is unwavering. Yet, as we improve our understanding of the complexities of the Chinese social and political system, it becomes increasingly apparent that challenging the current system is a risky endeavour. We may not like it but we don't necessarily have to do something about it. I can therefore see the emergence of a grand bargain in which the US accepts China's political and social structure and commits not to disrupt it in any way in exchange for China's commitment not to challenge the status quo in Asia. It may not be a spoken agreement but a tacit understanding that guides the relations in the years to come (Woolsey, 2016).

This means that the Trump administration will tend to avoid confrontation with China while continuing to increase US engagement with China in order to advance US security and economic interests. Trump's policy on China might not be a break with US traditional foreign policy; it is possibly a change in continuation.

Conclusion

There will be uncertain and unsettling moments in US-China relations under Trump. With his stated view of China as a rule-breaker, it is expected that the US China policy under Trump will cause much political tensions. The Trump administration will seek to negotiate better trade deals with China and take protectionist measures to compete with Chinese commodities. Also, the Trump administration will try to increase US military footprint in the Asia-Pacific which can be

code for rising confrontations between the United States and China, then there could be a rocky consequences for Asian security and stability. However, it should be noted that US China policy since 1972 has been a mixture of cooperation and confrontation. The United States under succeeding administrations have sought to repair rather than destroy its relations with China. The US-China relations under the Trump presidency will experience uneasy and unfriendly moments, yet the main pattern remains cooperative for their mutual interests. There will be very real concerns about US China policy under a President whose stated view of China suggests a strong desire to push back China. Still, the foundation of US-China cooperation should remain firmly in place under the Trump presidency. Trump's commitment to the US-China relations should prove as strong as that of his predecessors, all of whom, in their own way, tried to effectively manage differences and increase engagement with China. Indeed, changes need to be made, but some continuity in the US China policy in the Trump years would be welcome.

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