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Did America Get China Wrong?

The Engagement Debate

Wang Jisi; J. Stapleton Roy; Aaron Friedberg; Thomas Christensen and Patricia Kim; Joseph S. Nye, Jr.; Eric Li; Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner

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The View From China

Wang Jisi

"The United States has always had an outsize sense of its ability to determine China's course," Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner write in their article "The China Reckoning" (March/April 2018). Of course, China here could be replaced by present-day Egypt or Venezuela, or by South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in 1975. Americans have often thought that they could alter another country to their liking and then felt frustrated when things turned out otherwise. Still, Campbell and Ratner's self-reflection is admirable. And their counsel—that Washington should focus more on its own power and base its China policy on more realistic expectations—is worth taking seriously.

Although Campbell and Ratner have legitimate reasons to be dismayed at the direction of the U.S.-Chinese relationship, their Chinese counterparts may be equally disillusioned with, and probably more perplexed by, the United States. Some U.S. watchers in China, myself included, find the country we have studied for years increasingly unrecognizable and unpredictable. We should do our own self-reflection to examine what went wrong. Political polarization, power struggles, scandals, a lack of confidence in national establishments, tweets doubling as policy announcements, the frequent replacement of top officials in charge of foreign affairs, vacancies in important government positions—similar problems existed before, but their intensity and scope have been particularly stunning since the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The way the Trump administration is wielding U.S. power and influence is bewildering to Chinese political analysts. In recent years, Americans have often asked China to follow the "rules-based liberal international order." Yet Washington now has abandoned or suspended some of the same rules that it used to advocate, such as those of the Paris agreement on climate change and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It has become harder and harder for foreign-policy makers in China to discern what rules the Americans want themselves and others to abide by, what kind of world order they hope to maintain, and where Washington is on major international issues.

Even more unsettling to Beijing is that a new American consensus is emerging with regard to China. In the United States, "hard realists" focus on China's military and assertive behavior abroad, while "liberals" deplore China's effort to tighten political control at home. These two threads have converged in the view that China is a major "strategic competitor" and "revisionist power" that threatens U.S. interests. Official documents, such as the Trump administration's National Security Strategy, enshrine this depiction. As a result, U.S.-Chinese business deals, educational exchanges, and other agreements are becoming increasingly fraught. Previous crises, such as the NATO bombing of the

Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 or the midair collision of a Chinese fighter jet and a U.S. reconnaissance plane near China's Hainan Island in 2001, created temporary storms. The current deterioration in relations may prove more permanent.

Still, two larger principles should prevent a head-on confrontation between China and the United States. First, as the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has pointed out, the primary geopolitical divide today is between "the world of order" and "the world of disorder." Both China and the United States belong to the world of order. Campbell and Ratner regret that events elsewhere distracted from the Obama administration's effort to "pivot," or "rebalance," U.S. strategic attention to Asia. Yet that might not have been such a bad thing. Despite labeling China as the United States' principal rival, the Trump administration has fixed its attention on the world of disorder (especially the Middle East and North Korea), and that shouldn't change as long as China does not commit any blunder that might draw the United States' focus away from more imminent troubles.

Second, even as strategic competition and economic friction are likely to intensify between the two countries, there is potential for cooperation. U.S. renewable energy technology, for example, could help China address its environmental challenges. And millions of Chinese people would be willing to spend their savings on American medical breakthroughs if society-to-society ties were strengthened.

Campbell and Ratner seem disturbed by "the increasingly prominent view in China that the United States (along with the West more broadly) is in inexorable and rapid decline." In fact, Chinese think tanks and media constantly debate whether the United States is a declining power, and no consensus has emerged. Despite occasional triumphalism in Chinese official media, Beijing remains sober-minded enough to see China as a developing country still trying to catch up with the United States not only economically but also in terms of higher education and technological know-how. In reality, compared with most other countries in the world, both China and the United States are rising powers. Although China is rising more rapidly, the power gap between the two countries is still significant. It would be wise for China to adhere to Deng Xiaoping's approach of "keeping a low profile" and to avoid overstretching its resources.

In his 2011 book, *On China*, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger proposed that Beijing and Washington establish a relationship of "co-evolution," in which "both countries pursue their domestic imperatives, cooperating where possible, and adjust their relations to minimize conflict." I think "co-evolution" also means "benign competition." Finding out which country is better able to handle its domestic affairs and satisfy its citizens is the most constructive form of competition between China and the United States.

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Engagement Works

J. Stapleton Roy

Attacks on the supposedly failed China policy of the past 40 years, such as that by Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, are based on the false premise that the policy was meant to remake China in the United States' image. Such critiques often fail to distinguish between the way Washington publicly justifies its policies, by referring to values, and the way it actually formulates them, by putting national interests first.

Consider Richard Nixon, the ultimate realist. In 1967, before his election to the presidency, he wrote in this magazine about the need to transform China. But when he became president, and his skillful policy brought China to the U.S. side in the Cold War, his real intent became clear: not to turn China into a democracy but to gain a geopolitical advantage for the United States in the competition with the Soviet Union.

Another example is U.S. efforts to establish diplomatic relations with China in the late 1970s. (I participated in the secret negotiations as a State Department official.) Washington could not fully exploit its advantage in the Cold War without establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing. It was that sentiment—and not gauzy dreams of Chinese democracy—that drove the policy of normalization.

An exception to the rule of interest-based policy formulation was the Clinton administration's misguided decision in 1993 to link most favored nation trading status to human rights in a vain effort to use economic leverage to force changes in Chinese behavior. (As the U.S. ambassador to China at the time, I doubted the wisdom of this approach but sought to carry it out to the best of my ability.) The policy failed, not because of obduracy in Beijing but because the United States put one of its interests in opposition to another. This produced internecine warfare in Washington. Ultimately, the president rescinded the policy.

To date, constructive engagement has served U.S. interests well. Since the 1980s, cooperation with China has advanced U.S. national interests in many areas. American businesses were eager to tap into the Chinese market, and U.S. companies lowered the cost of their goods by taking advantage of cheaper labor. Although Maoist China believed that nuclear proliferation would break the monopoly of imperialists and hegemons, China under Deng Xiaoping accepted that proliferation posed a threat to Chinese interests and acceded to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1992. Today, dealing with global warming would be impossible without Chinese cooperation.

Meanwhile, China changed for the better all on its own. The Communist Party's decision to let the country's best students study at U.S. universities, exposing them to the vitality of the U.S. market-based economy and showing them the positive role that an independent judiciary and a free press can play in checking abuses of power and corruption, has made a profound impact. Chinese diplomats, some trained in the United States, have become highly professional. Chinese financiers have brought home financial skills learned in the West. And Chinese lawyers, influenced by international standards, have quietly drafted new prison laws to curb torture and the mistreatment of prisoners.

Should the United States have hindered the economic development in China that has lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of abject poverty? How would that have accorded with U.S. values? At every step of the way, U.S. policymakers have known that a more prosperous and more powerful China would take on the characteristics of a rising power. That was not, and should not have been, cause for alarm. Do Americans really believe that their government lacks the capacity to deal with powerful countries in ways that do not lead to war?

Last fall, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified to Congress that China would become the biggest threat to the United States by 2025. That is quite possible. Should Washington mistakenly conclude that this outcome is predetermined, it will happen even sooner. Slashing the State Department's budget, inducing the most experienced Foreign Service officers to leave in droves, and disparaging diplomacy will weaken the foreign policy arm of U.S. strategy and make military solutions the sole alternative.

There is a better way. The wisest approach would be to continue engaging with China while focusing on advancing U.S. interests. If Washington behaves responsibly, the U.S. military presence in East Asia will balance China's growing strength and foster its peaceful rise. Meanwhile, the United States should stop sending the world the message that it is no longer prepared to play a constructive global leadership role. Instead, it should emphasize that U.S. policies seek the common good, not simply the good of the United States. Making the U.S. model more attractive should be the starting point of any effort to deal with a rising China.

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The Signs Were There

Aaron Friedberg

Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner's essay is a valuable contribution to the intensifying debate over the future of U.S. China policy, but it is also incomplete and, in certain respects, misleading. Although no school of thought or individual observer can claim to have gotten China completely right over the past quarter century, some have done better than others at grasping Beijing's motivations and anticipating its behavior. The "clear-eyed rethinking of the United States' approach to China" that Campbell and Ratner call for should begin by acknowledging this disparity and examining the divergent beliefs and assumptions that lie behind it.

As the authors note, events have decisively disproved the predictions of those who claimed that engagement would lead to China's economic and political liberalization and its transformation into a "responsible stakeholder" in the U.S.-led international order. Optimistic observers underestimated the Chinese Communist Party's resourcefulness, ruthlessness, and unwavering determination to retain its exclusive grip on domestic political power, and they overstated the material and ideological forces that were supposedly pushing China toward greater openness, integration, and democracy. Since Deng Xiaoping began the process of "reform

and opening up," China's leaders have confounded the expectations of their Western counterparts, finding ways to enjoy the benefits of participation in the global economy while retaining control over their people through an evolving mixture of co-optation, coercion, and indoctrination.

Whether they realized it or not, the optimists were influenced by academic theories about the requirements of economic growth, the links between development and democracy, and the socializing effects of participation in international institutions. The widespread acceptance and apparent authority of these theories made it easier to downplay or ignore evidence that seemed to contradict them. In addition, from the 1990s onward, Beijing used propaganda and influence operations to encourage the perception that engagement was achieving its desired effects.

Many optimists also appear to have suffered from a failure of imagination and a lack of strategic empathy. They could not conceive of what Beijing might want other than to become a full member of the Western "club," and they seem not to have understood that the liberal principles on which the prevailing international order was based were profoundly threatening to China's authoritarian rulers. Whatever their shortcomings, however, optimistic arguments underpinned a set of policies that promised to promote peace and stability and that were enormously profitable for at least some sectors of American society. It is not surprising that these policies were backed by a broad coalition of experts, business executives, politicians, and former government officials.

In support of their assertion that "all sides of the policy debate erred," Campbell and Ratner include one example of what might be called "hawkish optimism": the argument that if it maintained a sufficient margin of advantage, the United States could dissuade China from trying to compete with it in the military domain. Although this view had some adherents, with the passage of time, most China hawks argued not that competition could be avoided but that the United States needed to run faster in order to stay ahead. If not for the 9/11 attacks, this is the approach that the George W. Bush administration would have pursued with greater vigor, and it was the course of action that the Obama administration attempted to resume with its 2011 announcement of the "pivot."

The fact is that not everyone has been equally optimistic about the ability of U.S. policy to change China or to steer relations onto a smooth and peaceful trajectory. Absent from Campbell and Ratner's account is any discussion of those who, for some time, have questioned the efficacy of engagement and warned that an escalating competition with China was, if not inevitable, then highly likely. Like their optimistic cousins, these skeptics came in several varieties. As China's economic growth accelerated in the 1990s, some theorists of international relations (such as Samuel Huntington) cautioned that fast-rising states have historically tended to seek regional, if not global, hegemony, pursuits that have often brought them into conflict with the dominant powers of their day. Around that time, a handful of defense analysts (led by Andrew Marshall, the director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment) began to warn that if it acquired large

numbers of conventional precision-strike weapons, China might be able to offset the United States' seemingly overwhelming advantage in military capabilities, thus neutralizing its ability to project power into the western Pacific. And beginning in the early years of this century, despite talk of village elections, the growth of civil society, and the unstoppable momentum of market-driven reforms in China, a few close observers (such as James Mann, Andrew Nathan, and Minxin Pei) identified retrograde, repressive, statist, and nationalist tendencies in the political and economic policies of the Chinese regime.

For most of the past quarter century, the skeptics struggled to gain traction against their more numerous, influential, and optimistic opponents. In time, U.S. policy grew ever more lopsided. Washington continued to pursue engagement while failing to invest adequately in the diplomatic and military policies needed to balance China's growing strength and without paying sufficient attention to the risks of opening up its economy and society to an emerging strategic competitor.

The United States and its democratic allies today face an increasingly rich and powerful authoritarian rival that is both ambitious and deeply insecure. China's rulers are attempting to use every instrument at their disposal to reshape Asia and the world in ways that serve their interests and defend their domestic regime. This is a challenge of historic proportions. But it should not have come as a surprise.

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Don't Abandon Ship

Thomas Christensen and Patricia Kim

Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner brand decades of U.S. policy toward China as a failure, reflecting Washington's current apprehension over the direction of Beijing's domestic and foreign policies. But their article misses the mark in fundamental ways, offering an often inaccurate account of U.S. officials' expectations of and strategies toward China and sweeping the many achievements of past decades under the rug.

It is unrealistic to think that the United States could drive China to abandon its political system and to curb its ambitions to become a great power. But history has demonstrated that the United States can affect how China pursues its interests by projecting American strength and leveraging common interests. It would be rash and self-destructive, therefore, for Washington to abandon efforts to shape China's policy choices, as Campbell and Ratner suggest.

Campbell and Ratner identify President Richard Nixon's opening to China as the start of a failed attempt to alter China's political trajectory. But rapprochement was never designed primarily as a means to change Beijing's basic interests; it was about recognizing common interests and working with China for mutual benefit. China's decision to side with the anti-Soviet camp created enormous advantages for the United States and great costs for the Soviet Union. For example, the Chinese border with the Soviet Union and Mongolia tied down more Soviet forces than were stationed in all the Warsaw Pact countries.

Through rapprochement, Chinese leaders also came to see the stabilizing benefits of the U.S. presence in East Asia, which underpinned its tacit acceptance of the U.S.-Japanese alliance. As Campbell and Ratner point out, Beijing today is much less sanguine about this system and is increasing its capabilities to counter the U.S. military presence in the region. But there is little evidence of a concerted effort to drive the U.S. military out of Asia. Chinese analysts still grudgingly recognize that the U.S. presence can serve as a restraint on U.S. allies in the region and prevent the escalation of local conflicts. Washington can still use this common desire for stability, along with clear projections of U.S. strength, to encourage cooperative behavior by China in East Asia.

Although the United States made some compromises on its Taiwan policy along the path toward the normalization of relations with China in 1979, it has successfully protected the island from domination despite the massive rise of mainland China's power in subsequent decades. Under the United States' own "one China" policy, the United States has maintained a robust relationship with Taiwan, which has created incentives for mainland China not to act rashly to achieve unification. Taiwan is now a free and wealthy democracy. It almost certainly would not be either of those things without the United States' balanced, informed, and firm posture toward cross-strait relations over the last five decades.

U.S. policies toward China and the World Trade Organization have also fostered a web of economic interdependence that has produced great prosperity and arguably been a major force for peace. Since China joined the WTO, in 2001, U.S. exports to China have grown faster than U.S. imports from China. China is now the United States' third-largest export market. Beijing's recently introduced "Made in China 2025" campaign and the ongoing coerced transfer of intellectual property from foreign firms to Chinese ones are troubling, but this is hardly the fault of WTO agreements, which are primarily about trade. What is needed to address such problems are more agreements—for example, a bilateral investment treaty and U.S. accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership—and much better enforcement of existing ones.

The effort since 2005 to urge China to become a "responsible stakeholder" in the existing international order has often been frustrating, but it has hardly been a failure. The United States has convinced a reluctant China to contribute to important international efforts, such as reducing genocidal violence in Sudan, pushing Iran to negotiate the nuclear deal, and pressuring North Korea to reenter negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The United States has little choice but to seek Chinese cooperation on such matters: China's economic footprint is so large in these troubled regions that it could single-handedly undercut international pressure.

Campbell and Ratner seem to suggest that almost anything China does to become more influential, including developing a stronger military, is revisionist. To them, that's true even of China's development of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (which adheres to the existing norms of international development lending), because they view the international order as by definition U.S.-led. According to this logic, the only way that U.S. policy could be considered a success is if China were to stop getting

stronger or refrain from seeking a larger voice with its growing power. Such a standard is unrealistic and provides no guidance for how the United States can best manage the reality of China's increasing power and influence.

Although the United States could never dictate Chinese foreign policy, it can, along with allies and partners, shape the environment around China so that destabilizing policy options appear unwise to Chinese elites. As China's power grows, this task will become more challenging, but it is not impossible. It can be achieved with precisely the policies Campbell and Ratner advocate, including a strong U.S. presence in East Asia and the avoidance of unnecessary confrontations. In fact, this is what U.S. officials in all administrations since Nixon's have advocated. And despite dismissing decades of U.S. China policy as an utter failure, Campbell and Ratner largely promote a strategy of staying the course.

Campbell and Ratner are rightly concerned about various disappointing trends in Chinese domestic and foreign policy since the 2008 financial crisis: the strengthening of authoritarianism at home, the moves away from marketization, and China's abandonment of its "peaceful rise" diplomacy of the previous decade in favor of assertive behavior in regard to sovereignty disputes in the East China and South China Seas. But many Chinese observers, including well-placed ones in the Chinese Communist Party, share these concerns and disappointments. In 2007, few of them would have anticipated all that transpired in the decade that followed, so it seems unfair to claim that U.S. China watchers were naive or ill informed when they hoped for or expected better.

Ultimately, if there is to be progressive political change in China, it will have to come from within China itself. But the United States should continue encouraging Chinese leaders to seek political stability and greater prosperity through more liberty and freer markets. The United States can do this in two ways: by getting its own house in order to set an example that inspires Chinese citizens and elites and by continuing to try to persuade Chinese leaders at all levels that political and economic reform will produce more stability and wealth than will doubling down on statist economics and authoritarianism. Liberal democratic ideas are still powerful in China—that is precisely why the Chinese Communist Party spends so many resources countering them.

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Time Will Tell

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner are right to raise questions about the assumptions that have guided U.S. China policy. Twenty-five years ago, the West bet that China would head toward democracy and a market economy. Such a bet was not simply the product of post–Cold War illusions. Social science theories of modernization suggested that as an economy approached

the threshold of an annual income of $10,000 per capita, an expanding middle class would demand more liberties. This expectation was based not only on Western history but also on the recent experiences of Asian countries such as South Korea. Moreover, the development of the Internet meant that societies had access to vastly more information than ever before. U.S. President Bill Clinton said that trying to control the Internet would be like trying to "nail Jell-O to the wall." As it turned out, the Chinese Communist Party proved quite adept at that seemingly impossible task.

Were these theories wrong? Yes, in the short run, but it is too soon to be sure for the long run. It may take many more decades for modernization theories to be properly tested by history.

Regardless, U.S. policy toward China has not been a total failure. When I supervised the Pentagon's East Asian strategy review in 1994, the United States knew that if it tried to contain China and prevent its economic growth, it would fail, because such a policy had no support in the region or elsewhere. Moreover, as I told the U.S. Congress at the time, treating China as an enemy would guarantee that it would become one. Integrating China into the international order would not assure future friendship, but it would keep open a range of cooperative possibilities.

Just to be safe, however, we created an insurance policy in case this bet failed. As Campbell has pointed out elsewhere, when it comes to U.S. grand strategy in Asia, some Americans start with China and work from the inside out. Others work from the outside in and aim to stabilize the situation by arranging alliances in the region to balance Chinese power. That was the strategy we chose during the Clinton administration.

In 1994, we began to revive the U.S.-Japanese security alliance, which was in bad shape. Many Americans regarded the alliance as a Cold War relic, and some even feared a Japanese economic threat. In Japan, many politicians viewed the U.S. treaty as obsolete and wanted a closer relationship with China or reliance on the UN, instead of the United States, for security. After two years of hard work, we were able to reduce support for those positions in both countries. The joint declaration on a security alliance signed in April 1996 established the U.S.-Japanese treaty as the basis for stability and prosperity in East Asia in the post–Cold War era. It remains so to this day. Some American hawks argue that China wishes to expel the United States from the western Pacific, or at least push the country back beyond the chain of islands that run along China's coast. But Japan is the heart of this island chain, and it pays the United States to keep 50,000 troops there. China is in no position to expel the U.S. military.

No one can be certain about China's long-term future—not even Chinese President Xi Jinping. If the United States maintains its alliances with Australia and Japan and continues to develop good relations with India, it will hold the best cards in the Asian balance of power. The United States is better positioned than China not just in terms of military power but also in terms of demographics, technology, currency reserves, and energy independence. There is no need to succumb to exaggerated fears. Washington can wait

to see what future decades will produce in Beijing. Deng Xiaoping created a framework for institutional succession, which Xi has torn up. Xi's new system might not last forever. In the meantime, there are issues such as climate change, pandemic disease, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and financial instability on which both countries can benefit from cooperation.

Maybe the United States was not so wrong after all. As strategic gambles go, the outside-in China policy has proved more robust than the current handwringers recognize.

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Better Together

Eric Li

Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner rightly conclude that the United States needs to adjust its basic assumptions about China and pursue a more sustainable bilateral relationship. But the historical and contemporary contexts on which the authors draw to reach such a conclusion are deeply flawed. A strategic redesign based on this faulty reasoning would make the world less stable and leave the United States in a weaker position.

First, the assessment that the United States has always failed to induce changes in Chinese behavior is incorrect. Campbell and Ratner neglect to mention that President Richard Nixon's opening to China altered Chinese policies in the United States' favor, which was arguably one of the most decisive factors in the outcome of the Cold War. Second, Beijing's participation in Washington-led economic globalization has made China perhaps the largest contributor to global economic expansion and interconnectedness in the past three decades. Fifteen years ago, the Chinese grand strategist Zheng Bijian coined the term "peaceful rise" to describe China's development. Many doubted such a shift would be possible. But a peaceful rise has already happened to a large extent.

In both ancient and modern times, violence and disruptions have accompanied the rise of great powers. The Athenian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the British Empire, along with France, Germany, Japan, and the United States, all invaded countless countries and territories, killed massive numbers of people, and subjugated large populations to enable their ascents. China's rise has been faster and bigger, yet so far, it has been largely peaceful. This is in no small part because of China's successful integration into the post–World War II international order.

As Campbell and Ratner admit, China has participated fully in the international institutions that it has joined, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. The authors fault China for not fully supporting, and at times seeking to undermine, the U.S. alliance system in Asia, which they present as a bedrock of the order. But China is excluded from this alliance system. Washington should not expect Beijing to comply with a system that acts against China's national interests.

American elites such as Campbell and Ratner assume that the current

international order empowers the United States to compel other countries to accept its political system and values and to militarily enforce what Washington views as the correct application of international rules. But the post–World War II order confers no such legitimacy. The UN Charter specifically guarantees national sovereignty. That was the kind of international order China signed on to after Nixon's outreach; Beijing has never accepted Washington's post–Cold War revision of the order, which expanded the powers of the U.S. alliance system to attack or invade sovereign nations without the endorsement of the UN Security Council.

China and the United States should and must cooperate to ensure a peaceful and productive twenty-first century. A realignment of the bilateral relationship is necessary, but it should be based on a correct understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts. If U.S. elites continue to believe that their country is entitled to global hegemony, the United States will accelerate its own decline. The world is too big, and too many developing countries are rapidly catching up, for a country of 325 million people to be its sole ruler.

But if the United States abandons its post–Cold War triumphalism and returns to the priorities that made the twentieth century "the American century"—rebuilding its own social cohesion, achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth, and investing in the future—it can excel in a more competitive world without making an enemy of China or anyone else. If the United States treats China, and indeed also Russia, with the respect that such a great power deserves by recognizing its natural sphere of influence, it will have a chance to remain the world's most powerful country for a long time.

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Campbell and Ratner Reply

In "The China Reckoning," we advanced a straightforward set of claims: that U.S. policy toward China, particularly since the end of the Cold War, has been undergirded by the belief that China would gradually liberalize and broadly accept the existing international system; that the gap between these aspirations and China's actual evolution is growing wider; and that this divergence calls for a reassessment of U.S. strategy.

The responses to our piece collected here are thoughtful contributions to the debate over how to interpret and advance U.S.-Chinese relations. Notably, despite quibbles over historical context and language, the responses rarely challenge our core arguments.

Admittedly, there are areas where our essay would have benefited from greater clarity or detail. It is true that many motivations have animated U.S. policy apart from ambitions to shape China's future. Nevertheless, we stand by the assertion that assumptions about how China would change have been deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. policymaking. These were not merely rhetorical devices to justify alternative ends, as Stapleton Roy suggests.

A careful reading of our essay should belie several reflexive and unfounded critiques. We did not argue that U.S.

policy has been an "utter failure," as Thomas Christensen and Patricia Kim claim. This misinterpretation stems in part from sins of omission. We should have more prominently underscored the consequential achievements of U.S. China policy, including the remarkable diplomatic opening that reshaped the contours of the Cold War. We did, however, acknowledge that Washington's engagement with Beijing has produced tremendous commercial gains and led to critical Chinese contributions on major international issues, including efforts to curb the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea. Critics are right to add multilateral cooperation on climate change and stability across the Taiwan Strait to that list of accomplishments, and we agree that the environment and global health are important areas for future U.S.-Chinese collaboration.

That said, despite decades of diplomatic exchanges and a robust economic relationship, bilateral cooperation has remained hard fought and narrow, rarely enduring beyond particular moments when U.S. and Chinese interests happened to align. There are many reasons for this, but it is telling that China has been more willing to make concessions in response to the Trump administration's threats of punitive action—for example, on North Korea and trade—than was often the case during the preceding decades of intense and respectful strategic engagement. This is less an endorsement of President Donald Trump's approach than a recognition that Beijing rarely went to its bottom line under the policies pursued by previous U.S. administrations. Future U.S. officials will have to wrestle with this uncomfortable reality.

Nowhere do we assert that U.S. policymakers were naive or ill informed. For example, contrary to what some of our critics claim, we argued that U.S. engagement was grounded in modest expectations for gradual reforms, not rosy hopes for imminent Chinese democratization. In our view, many of these assessments were reasonable at the time, given the prevailing uncertainty over China's development. Nonetheless, it is now clear that China is challenging core U.S. interests in ways that policymakers either did not anticipate or hoped to prevent.

Some critics have urged us to be more patient, arguing that China's political evolution is not yet complete and that Washington should remain focused on efforts to empower reformers or, in the words of Christensen and Kim, "persuade Chinese leaders" to relinquish authoritarianism and China's statist model. But continuing to base policy primarily on what the United States wants China to be, rather than what China is, will only inhibit Washington's ability to respond effectively to the challenge. Although we concur that the Chinese people would benefit from a more representative system, near-term change does not appear likely. The United States needs a strategy to cooperate and compete with a China that is decidedly illiberal at home and abroad, even if we wish it were otherwise.

We readily acknowledge, as Aaron Friedberg observes, that there has been a healthy debate on China policy over the years, with no shortage of dissenting voices, some of whom warned that U.S. decision-making was based on overly optimistic expectations. But none of those arguments carried the day. After pivotal events such as the fall of the

Soviet Union, the Taiwan Strait crises of the mid-1990s, the 9/11 attacks, the global financial crisis of 2008, and the rise of Xi Jinping in 2012, Washington repeatedly returned to the same consensus approach. This current juncture, however, feels different, in part because the costs of being wrong about China's future are now substantially larger than in previous decades. The combination of China's increasing power and Beijing's propensity to wield it in a manner that is out of step with global norms suggests that a true China reckoning has arrived.

Some objections to our essay have centered on fears that rethinking U.S. China policy will necessarily lead to another Cold War. We did not call for the United States to contain China as it once contained the Soviet Union; in fact, we explicitly ruled out trying to isolate or weaken China as a sensible U.S. aim. That some commentators view containment as the default alternative to the traditional policy is itself a testament both to the urgent need for new ideas and to the paucity of strategic options in the current debate.

Furthermore, reexamining U.S. China policy does not require one to endorse Trump's foreign policies. There are commendable elements of the Trump administration's approach to Asia (even if much of it remains inchoate or incomplete), but an "America first" attitude to trade, alliances, human rights, and diplomacy runs the risk, as we wrote, of being "confrontational without being competitive." Analysts at home and abroad should take care to separate a much-needed debate on U.S. China policy from critiques of Trump.

We share the views of Wang Jisi and Joseph Nye that the foundations of American power are strong. The United States boasts top-notch universities, innovative companies, favorable demographic trends, strong alliances, and plentiful energy resources, all of which provide a sound basis to protect and advance U.S. values and interests. We further agree that Washington should address endemic political dysfunction, fiscal irresponsibility, and income inequality at home, which threaten the United States' future at least as much as any foreign power does.

Our objective in writing "The China Reckoning" was to interrogate the old consensus and spark a debate about the assumptions that have guided U.S. China policy, not to propose specific prescriptions. Analysts and policymakers need to refocus their lenses and grapple with new realities. We hope that our essay and these responses will mark a meaningful step in that direction.

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