
Washington's Isolationism vs Beijing's Expansionism

Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) in the twentieth century endured political upheaval and unrest, famine, a crippled economy, stagnation, and bloodshed. The imperialist empire, which prior to the twentieth century had always been known as a rich and prosperous civilization witnessed its end. In the twentieth century, as China's population suffered large numbers of death and oppression, China faded into the background of world dominance and faced isolationism. The West, in the late twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, led by the United States (US), embarked on what it saw as a mission to revive the PRC, otherwise known as the "*China Fantasy*".

This *China Fantasy* was in hopes that if the economy of the Asian nation was to grow, exposed to capitalization and the free market, political liberalization and democracy would only naturally ensue. "*Trade freely with China, and time is on our side*", said President George W. Bush in 2000 on his campaign trail, who advocated for a "*more open China*" in a quest familiar to America to promote freedom. President Bush in 2001 signed a proclamation granting China permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) with the US, which welcomed China into the global, rules-based trading system and membership to the World Trade Organization. Western companies and governments advanced large numbers of foreign trade and investments in China, as well as providing the country with trade incentives in order to stimulate social, economic, and political growth. In the mobile internet era, large tech companies have flooded Chinese markets in the last several years and today, China stands as the world's most populous country, the world's second largest economy in comparison to the US, accounts for approximately 14.9% of the global GDP, and has expressed ambition of becoming a global superpower under the Presidency of Xi Jinping.

The PNTR certainly enabled China's growth in trade and in its economy - as it was meant to do. After a couple of decades of nurture, China is the US' largest trading partner, and in 2017, the US goods deficit with China ironically was \$375.2 billion. Seventeen years after Bush signed the PNTR into effect, not everyone finds themselves happy about the way bilateral trade with China has turned out for the US. Donald Trump in his 2016 campaign for US President slammed China hard for trade deals that are now seen as unfair in his opinion, artificial devaluation of the Renminbi, theft of intellectual property, and the transfer of jobs from the US to China. Donald Trump's campaign turned into a Presidency, and the discontent with China has now become more than words.

Throughout the less than two years that Donald Trump has been President, Trump has maintained his firm stance against China and the infringements he states have been made. His rhetoric towards China has escalated to a point which has now elicited a response from China's President, Xi Jinping. Beijing initially ignored the threats coming from Washington, but

as the administration under Trump began to make subsequent accusations and retaliating in a variant of ways, Beijing reacted. The recent months have displayed animosity from both of the world's biggest economies that has turned into an all-out trade war and frigid relations between the two countries. The world is closely watching how the subsequent tariffs that have been issued by both sides as part of the trade war will affect the global trade market. In September, President Trump distributed \$250 billion tariffs on Chinese exports which could have monumental impacts on the economy. In retaliation, China did the same, but to a lesser extent.

Behind the veil of the trade war are also layers of political and military vies for power. Slowly but steadily, the PRC has demonstrated its rapid growth and dominance. This has been done through a strategic series of diplomatic negotiations, partnerships, business deals, and infrastructure projects. China, through these actions carefully tries to cultivate its "*China 2035*" plan envisioned by President Jinping. Jinping's goal with "*China 2035*" is for China to be competitive with developed manufacturing economies and a master of quality. Policies under his administration are aimed to enhance innovation and production efficiency, and to be a global leader in technology and international relations. The current world superpower, the US, has certainly noticed this. In retaliation to the fear the Trump administration now has of a possible reshuffling of power due to the dragon in the East, the trade war is the best mode of response the current US Government could muster. As in the past, the US approach to China has been to somewhat accommodate it, there has been a fast response in how to revert this approach, which has resulted in little planning or thought of consequence.

The US and the PRC are now in tight battle to gain or retain respective power. This is seen overall through the current economic clashes, military presence in the South China Sea, and the dispute over Taiwan. Although predicted by some scholars not to escalate to a full military clash between the two parties, and has not quite yet been termed an exact '*cold war*', the developments of the hostilities of the two nations will largely have impact on the world, its order, and its economic production. How the US and China choose to go forth in the selected path will shape the course of the 21st century and it will be interesting to take note how each party proceeds and what will be the end result. The US foreign policy in approach to China is that there is no exact approach; under the Trump administration the trade war is a result of erratic policy making and behavior. President Trump's main concerns are to firstly, appease his voter base in the US, secondly, the economy and finances, and third, "*America First*". These tactics have led to numerous irrational choices and methods by the US President as they are for short-term gratification.

The greatest danger is not the rise of China itself, but how the US reacts to its rise and the chance of its own loss of primacy. Illiberalism in America is not an accident and can be coincided with a recognition of American decline; the trade war and cold tensions with China seem to be desperate desires to prevent this perceived decline in the world. However, China, especially under President Jinping, has a clear, laid out, long-term vision and goal. This long-term vision is inclusive of China's '*One Belt One Road*' (OBOR) initiative, laws and regulations

pertaining to trade and business, and the engagement of the Chinese diaspora abroad. Both of these country's methods create a sharp contrast, with one similarity - nationalism. These distinct approaches, and the clashes that ensue as a result, can be distinctly seen throughout South Asia. From Pakistan, to Afghanistan, to India, and Maldives, both China's and the US foreign policy can be witnessed as present and at higher rates in these areas than in the past, and evidence of the tension and clashes extant.

China's Plan

President Xi Jinping's vision for China encompasses many long-term goals that he wishes remain solidified; even the constitution has been written to incorporate many of its ambitions for the future. In fact, this is a desire that goes as far back as the 1949 "One China" plan. Jinping is aware that this vision could face high levels of deterrence, but is ready to counteract any that may appear. With this, China has been working towards a boost in its image abroad, aware that a negative image could provoke setbacks.

Often criticized for human rights violations and a totalitarian government, China looks to expand its improvements outwards to cover up its indiscretions inwards. These criticisms of human rights violations stem from the severe suppression of expression and identity of the Muslim Uyghur population in China's Northwest Xinjiang Province over concerns that the movement for the Uyghurs to become separate from China will lead to a loss of territory; the Chinese Government has increased restrictions and intrusions in Uyghur lifestyles, like placing Uyghur men and women into 're-education', or internment camps. The crackdown is under the false pretext of preventing radicalization and terrorism within its Muslim population.

Because President Jinping and his Government have such a strict set of goals for the future of China and want to see it succeed at any means, the Government in turn has also constricted the population. Journalist Charlie Campbell back in 2016 wrote that China has become more repressive in five main ways under President Jinping. The first of these is by rule of law or "*using the law as a means to expand control over Chinese society while disregarding the law when it does not accommodate Party imperatives or advance Party objectives*". This 'rule by law' branches out to the increase of the quash of civil society, a dwindle in labor rights, media constriction, and a rise of nationalism.

China has sent diplomats to engage in preventing, managing or resolving conflict throughout different regions in the world. In 2017, China was actively mediating conflicts in nine countries. The reason for this is chiefly in respect to its *One Belt One Road* initiative, also known as the '*Belt and Road Initiative*' (BRI). The OBOR is described often as a rebuilding of the old Silk Road and is made up of a '*belt*' of overland corridors and a '*road*' of shipping lanes. With this multibillion dollar (more than \$1 Trillion) massive project, China plans to carry out construction projects in more than 60 countries along the perspective routes. Amongst these countries resides half of the world's population and a quarter of the world's GDP. It is a State-backed campaign for global dominance, a stimulus package for an economy that has begun to slow, and a marketing campaign for a Chinese global investment. Devised under the control

of Jinping, the OBOR seeks to connect Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is suspected by analysts that the initiatives are motivated by factors other than trade.

This can be seen by the increase of mediation efforts that began in 2013, the year the OBOR was launched. China was hesitant before 2013 to become engaged in external conflicts but, with the launch of the OBOR, Beijing now pays much more attention to international mediation efforts as well as publicizing these efforts. Motivated by domestic interest, there is, first, incentive to preserve stability along the Belt and Road to allow for a smooth flow of trade and investments through regions which may be unstable that are in the path of the OBOR. Second, this is also to preserve the safety of Chinese workers and its companies on site projects. Beijing realizes that without stability in key countries, the initiative is likely to fail. Mediation also adds to the country's self-created image as a '*responsible global power*' and one that seemingly cares about human rights. In mediating longstanding conflicts, China has an opportunity to influence the fates of some governments in key countries and assists Beijing in the protection and gardening of power regimes that are close to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At its root, all of this - developing physical infrastructure and mediation - is a way for China to establish and cement long-term political relationships and, most importantly, influence. Through trade deals, custom pacts, aid deployments, and infrastructure all through the OBOR, the OBOR in essence is the pulse of Beijing's ambitions of geo-political dominance.

Because of these ambitions and enactments of policy, support in China is high for Jinping despite the higher levels of oppression; many view him as strengthening China's role and making waves in the new world order. His challenge to the current status leads many to believe within the country that China will be able to rise to the top. The Government also works to elicit and engage support from those who are Chinese nationals living abroad. Part of the plan to influence politics is to actively involve the Chinese diaspora.

Within the CCP government, there is a department called the '*United Front Work*' and the department's activities include providing support and resources for overseas student groups, cultural associations, and influence operations. This department puts forth the promoted global narrative favored and pressures the Chinese diaspora who live in countries that are more open and free, like Western Europe and North America, to self-censor and stray away from issues that the CCP would find unfavorable. Jinping consistently emphasizes the importance of the *United Front Work* department and allocates it large amounts of funding. One concrete piece of evidence of China's stimulus of its diaspora and influence is through buying ads and space in US newspapers, like purchasing a '*China Daily Insert*' in the '*The Des Moines Register*' in Iowa that spoke highly of the benefits of a US-China trade partnership. Other newspapers are written and published by Chinese nationals living in North America or Europe and have direct correspondence with Beijing, writing what Beijing would like to promote, exemplifying soft power.

Large sums of money, time, and other resources are being invested in the future of China. Now that the country believes it has found a door open to potential global dominance, it is making sure it enters that door how it deems well-prepared and strong. Through

China's 'OBOR', mediations and international legislation that coincides with OBOR, engagement with overseas diaspora, and China's "2035" plan, the country under the CCP and its appetite for reform and change is an undeniable force that cannot stray from acknowledgement. It is important to note that China will not easily deter from its vision or concede. With the presence of Trump and his administration, once regarded as simply a minor nuisance, the pushback from China is likely to escalate as it makes it way full steam ahead.

The United States' Foreign Policy

With the Trump administration, China has moved from co-operation to competition as Vice President Mike Pence demonstrated with the statement: "*China is unequivocally as a competitor and threat to American interests*". One of President Trump's reasons for winning the Presidential Election in 2016 was the support of the working class; the working class is fearful of loss of jobs to China and perceives the Chinese to be a threat and President Trump tapped into this sentiment and blamed China for the downfall of the manufacturing industry. Although this is what got him elected, Trump and his administration are chiefly concerned with the appeasement of this class and the rest of his voter base and not much else; he wants to remind his base he's made good on promises to redo trade agreements as he also hopes that is a topic which can bring together a very bipartisan Washington: concrete counteraction has to be enacted when dealing with China. Not having any particular plan, but knowing something had to be done to appeal to his supporters, Trump has lashed out and issued multiple rounds of heavy tariffs, beginning in July with the most recent round in September and another promised for the beginning of 2019. Although the founded concern that exists in which pressure needs to be put on China, mainly for human rights violations and oppression of its population that it often gets a pass on, it has been stated that the economic leavers are not the way to go, nor will they be enough to reprimand China. It is also likely that Trump may have overlooked how Republican-voting American consumers will be affected and respond to the rise of prices by goods made in China due to the tariffs, like washing machines, cars, and other everyday items. The trade war and current animosity with China is run-off from poor policy leadership and the sole goal of simply to be liked.

Trump's foreign policy is in stark contrast to Jinping's; Under the Trump administration, erratic statements and negotiations are what drives today's foreign policy. If US policy making seems incoherent right now, it is often because the policy process is incoherent. With examples like North Korea, Trump uses feuds as a way to bring his trading partners or rivals to the table to negotiate and it is quite possible that this is his goal with China. There has been a growing belief within the administration that threats and bullying will work to elicit concessions from Beijing. But, what he seems to fail to understand, is that China will not back down easily from its plan. Analysts say it is likely that Trump may not '*really care if China complies or not*' in the long-run, perhaps adding to the incoherence, and further demonstrating his lack of desire to make policy in regards to anything else but his ego.

President Trump at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) this fall also took aim at China for meddling in the US election process. He stated, *“Regrettably, we found that China has been attempting to interfere in our upcoming 2018 election (which took place this past November 6th), against my administration. They do not want me or us to win because I am the first President ever to challenge China on trade. And we are winning on trade, we are winning at every level”*. This has since been proven to be unfounded by a few recent studies through Facebook and Twitter who have confirmed there has been no meddling like there has been found with Russia in the 2016 Presidential Election. Analysts again believe this to be targeted at Trump’s support base, a campaign ploy, and not really about China at all. It is a possible tactic to divert attention from everything happening at home domestically and internally: the scandal of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, effects of policies made by the administration, and the investigation into Russian meddling in 2016. This was then hardened by the Vice President’s speech in October at the Hudson Institute, speaking again of election interference without proof.

Vice President Pence’s speech was that of containment policy. As Trump and Pence, with the rest of the administration, try to navigate an *‘America First’* route, isolation and containment are what drive large parts of their policies. This has led to threats to withdraw military and financial assistance to many allies of the US and pull-outs from international agreements like the *‘Iran Deal’* and the *‘Paris Climate Accord’*. A sense of nationalism is heavy in the US, and again, Trump tries to tap into this sentiment in order to keep Republicans happy. This comes at a time where China is doing the opposite with its expansionism. What the US fails to realize is that the way to counteract China is not to withdraw from the global stage, but to be just as active or more so than China.

[The Standoff in more detail](#)

The rise of China under President Jinping has only highlighted how the US has been wrong about the CCP’s appetite for power and reform, and strengthening of party control. Throughout 2018, this has been consistently demonstrated. Experts speculate China’s Government realizes it can dismantle the US threat by undermining Trump’s voter base; this is most likely why it took out an ad in the *‘The Des Moines Register’* where it emphasized why trade with China was good and how the population would be hurt otherwise. Between the US’ hard hit with tariffs and trying to limit its production in the tech industry, Beijing claims the US is infringing upon its sovereignty. In addition to this, China is unsettled over the military presence by the US in the South China Sea *‘threatening its security’* and disruption of regional stability. Beijing in return has been criticized of limiting navigation in the important waters and the military has also vastly expanded under Jinping while he wishes to show China’s power.

Beijing at the moment might not find itself as powerful as Washington in some respects, as the US buys more from China than it sells to it, but there are many ways Beijing could make it difficult for the US. This could mean that American companies operating in China face more

red tape, in terms of registration, paperwork, bureaucracy, and struggles with visas. Hua Chunying, the Deputy Director of the Foreign Minister, made it clear that while the struggle with the US may persist, China “*must not affect its relationship with the entire Western World*”. China’s leaders have difficult decisions to make, like whether it will remain a rogue power that challenges the world order, or if it will concede. These further fuel China’s reach and negotiations with outside partners, like those apart of its OBOR as China understands it may have to give up a little to get a lot in the long-run. It lags behind in the imports from the US, yet there have been great strides of strength in technological prowess and geopolitical clout and could possibly withstand US pressure. To President Jinping, the sacrifice would be worth protecting his own position and his dream of China’s global preeminence.

The Trump administration worked in putting its words and backlash into some strategic action since beginning its trade war. The US has formed new trade agreements between Mexico and Canada, mainly with the purpose of preventing both nations from entering their own trade deals with China that Washington would not like, and makes it difficult for both to take that risk. Washington is also in the early process of talks with Japan and has revised an agreement with South Korea to stabilize trade agreements close to China and trade talks continue with Europe. But, this is all again focused simply on the economy and not in other areas that could prove more fruitful. Trump’s actions that are meant to destabilize China could actually, in turn, strengthen it if not careful by sending the average Chinese more against the US. Washington needs to better understand the activities of Jinping’s Government so that it can avoid overreacting in ways that could harm the democratic process and complicate Beijing’s activities. If Trump steadily makes erratic statements with coinciding behavior, the American public may tune out when and if Beijing escalates its interferences.

There is no denying the two economies are intertwined and have to remain so, despite being competitors now. There are many implications that could arise if the conflict is to continue. Together, China and the US make up approximately 40% of the global GDP. 70 economists who answered questions in a poll administered by ‘Reuters’ agreed the trade conflict was bad for economic growth, especially for the US. They were also unanimous in saying that the US-China trade war also “*threatened the outlook for the Eurozone*”. There have been effects from this as China’s economic growth has slowed, and growth was slower in September than in August. With more tariffs to come from the US, even on US exports to China, this could add inflationary pressures, especially in the US, which has implications for the Federal Reserve Policy. If continued, there could also be a shave of 0.05% on global growth within the next two years. If another round does come into place in 2019, this would skew the world economy.

[The Role in South Asia](#)

South Asia faces ongoing violent conflicts, like the dispute between India and Pakistan over the territory of Jammu & Kashmir, rising potential of nuclear confrontation in the region, growing radicalization of youth, and a presence of terrorist groups. South Asia remains one

of the most polarized regions in the world. There has been numerous years of comparative marginalization and neglect towards the South Asian subcontinent.

US foreign policy towards South Asia has consistently lacked stability and has varied, but yet still remains the largest stakeholder in the region and even more so now to further its interests and counteract China. US foreign policy also further perplexes the situations and divides the region. This is first demonstrated through the US relationship with Pakistan which consistently has faced a series of ups and downs. Afghanistan is probably the most consistent policy plan the US has had in South Asia, as the country has engaged in war there for the last 17 years against terrorism. As for the rest, administrations have maybe briefed themselves on issues residing in the area or have made a little presence, but nothing in depth. Under the Barack Obama administration, this did begin to slightly change as Obama seemed to realize that South Asia was a crucial diplomatic area where developing countries there are beginning to rise and that the area was at a crossroad with the rising Asian continent, that highlights geopolitical importance. India, for example, is rapidly growing and stands as the most populous democracy. Myanmar began to open up itself to the world under the leadership of Aung San Sou Kyi, thus President Obama attempted to make relations, although she has recently been stripped of her prestigious human rights award from Amnesty International and Myanmar has begun to retreat due backwards to the Rohingya Crisis. The US, along with other major powers, are increasing their involvement in the region. However, Obama's attempts to construct relations and agreements in the area may have come a little too late.

The Trump administration is not any different than its predecessors when it comes to establishing foreign policy towards South Asia. The relations are chiefly lead vis-à-vis Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, which makes it a three-pronged objective. The continuity stems from the institutionalization of the past US administrations' agendas, mainly the '*War on Terror*' and more recently, counteracting China. Beijing suspects the US of using Islamic State (IS) as a proxy in the region in order to exploit Chinese weakness in the Xinjiang Province. However, his New South Asia Strategy and sweeping comments have seem to have broken the mold a little. The US in the past has tried to nurture what relations it has had there out of fear of nuclear power and terrorism, and Trump's recent actions may inflate these. It is important in today's looming presence of China that the US realizes there is more to South Asia than just its three familiar relations.

China, which neighbors many countries of South Asia, has had a relatively higher presence in the lives of the countries there. However, this has dramatically grown in the last few years. Many of the countries that are key to the OBOR project are South Asian. South Asia, for China, is the gate to the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, both of which have strategic trade importance. OBOR projects running through South Asia also allow access to routes to land-locked countries of Central Asia opening up more trade there. Through South Asia, China has an open door to the rest of the world. Billions of dollars of infrastructure projects have been negotiated throughout this region, with many already finished or in effect, and Beijing has sent its workers to live and work various places in South Asia - this is yet another way China

infiltrates its influence. As the country sinks billions of dollars into the area, China will have great dominance over the region. This portrays how Chinese strategic interests under the pretext of development projects are not advantageous to South Asia or the US. It was not until the end of the Obama era, did America realize this was what was shaping and his efforts to begin relations in the area were not able to see fruition.

The US has been critical of China's One Belt One Road since its genesis, but it has taken Washington now over five years to develop a response to it - both under the Obama and Trump administrations. Again, experts view the trade war as a response for a lack of policy; the trade war seems to be trying to fill in the gaps of missing political relations and a retaliation against the power of China that dominates South Asia. The Belt and Road project has extreme relevancy to the majority of regions the US has vital interests in. Despite this, and the political and economic influence OBOR has, policies and initiatives against the OBOR have not been actionized. George Kennan, an American diplomat during the Cold war, rallied for containment policy of the Soviet Union, with troops allied with the Islands of Britain and Japan, each at the end of Eurasia - a thought to create a balance of power on both sides. However, this concept continued into the 21st century and organization is still along these lines. This has left Central Asia and South Asia with little attention and with no US alliance. China, now with its capabilities to do so, has taken advantage of this and tries to fill in as a superpower for countries that have been ignored. OBOR projects and Chinese relations are also in the works in Central Asian countries. The most recent and closest constructive strategy the Trump administration has made to counteract the OBOR, is the Indo-Pacific Strategy which allocates \$113 million to investments in emerging Asia in regards to new technology, energy and infrastructure. This is a similar approach to China's, but is it enough money and is it at a good time?

China's mediation efforts often are in countries with high profiled conflicts. Countries such as Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and even Syria, all find themselves on the list of China's conflict interferences in order to assure stability of the OBOR. Military backed Myanmar is in align with CCP's government, so involvement there seems logical for China. Some countries within South Asia, as well as the Middle East and Central Asia, welcome China. They see the country, in comparison to the US and other Western countries, as an honest broker and which do not carry the same historical baggage as the others have in the past. The governments and peoples of this region are concerned with lifting their populations out of poverty and view China's involvement, with the promises of infrastructure, jobs and trade, as a way to do so. They are also aware that in comparison to aid from the US and Europe, there will be less expectations and terms to abide by, like improvement of human rights situations or implementation of democratic institutions, as China has little concern over these due to its own oppressive regime. It seems easy money and easy aid, politically and economically, without losing the current establishment, and China knows this. This is aligned to the future of China and its regimented path and it is using this to its advantage.

Pakistan is the “*all weather friend*” of China - Islamabad was among the first to recognize the PRC. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is China’s shiny gem that is a part of the country’s more expansive OBOR project. Approximately \$62 billion has been invested into mega development projects throughout the country, from the top of the disputed region of the State of Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan Administered Gilgit Baltistan that borders China’s Xinjiang Province, down to the port in Gwadar, Baluchistan which gives access to the Indian Ocean. Pakistan’s location is strategic as it gives access to the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and it is the foremost battle ground in the war on terror; a strong relationship with Pakistan could prove to be most useful for China in navigating world politics and trade, achieving greater economic power. For Pakistan, China has come forward as a replacement for everything the US has lacked offering or has failed to fulfill and has emerged as Pakistan’s biggest trading partner and donor, replacing the US. This month, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited China in order to secure funds so as to not seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), deepening Pakistan’s dependence and relations with the giant. Western powers are seen as receding from the country, and China is using this opportunity to solidify further their relations, without Pakistan realizing that the investments on behalf of China towards Pakistan are of such colossal magnitude and respectively the obligations of Pakistan towards China are so unbearably high, that Pakistan might find itself in a situation where the only possible solution for overcoming this issue is through its transfer of power, independence and sovereignty to Beijing.

President Trump this year, stating that Washington has grown tired of Pakistan’s ‘*double game*’, has pulled billions of dollars in funds from Pakistan that were used for development to fight terrorist outfits is concurrent with his policy approaches of “*America First*” and isolationism. The US has donated billions of dollars to Pakistan since 2001 to help fight its *War on Terror*. Foreign policy of the US for Pakistan has always been characterized with politico-economic opportunism and utility. Pakistan after 9/11 appeared as a useful tool, but Pakistan played a double game. Despite the frictions that reside, Pakistan has understood it is important to keep the US close for as long as possible as the support of the superpower would be beneficial in numerous ways.

Accusations of Pakistan’s ‘*double game*’ arise from Pakistan’s safe harboring of terrorist organizations while continuing to accept money to fight said organizations. China conveniently turns a blind eye to this. For example, China has publicly defended Pakistan in regards to the assassination of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, claiming that Pakistani intelligence officials were unaware of his presence in the country. Additionally, China has used its veto power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to guard terrorist organizations and individuals; China has three times blocked efforts in adding the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (the political arm of Lashkar-e-Taiba) to the list of designated terrorist groups. China is well aware of the ties of Jamaat-ud-Dawa with the Pakistani Army and their Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). This support for Pakistan’s approach towards terrorism clearly illustrates its desperation to establish a strong relationship.

The trade war and Trump's isolationism has afforded Pakistan an opportunity to inspect its relationships and analyze which one will be best. President Trump's removal of funds from Pakistan probably comes as an advantage to China because it does not have to counteract US influence anymore in Pakistan. This can bring both the CCP and military establishment of Pakistan closer in terms of politics. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in an interview while in Washington in September criticized the move from Trump making the statement, *"If he (Trump) traveled to Pakistan maybe he could be more sensitive to more of the concerns we have. The US is safe today because of the people sacrificing themselves; they were not helping terrorism, they were helping their own country. Friends change, circumstances change"*. Qureshi went on to continue in the interview that *"We are looking at different options and new friends in the region and we have friends who have been consistently reliable and realize that Pakistan is well located and what our value is... China being one of them"*. This is most likely the attitude Prime Minister Khan carried by arranging the meeting with China. Although it is possibly fair to address the duplicity of Pakistan, a hands-off approach from the US may lead the relationship to sour even further and not in the direction the US hopes with this measure.

China is not alone in tariffs from the US; India also has recently received tariffs from the US in retaliation of New Delhi purchasing an S-400 air defense system from Moscow. A recent law from Washington mandates that the purchase of Russian defense equipment invites sanctions and tariffs. This puts into question how serious the US is with their relationship with India, a country which has been growing steadily itself. However, the Government in the US is aware of the importance of a good partnership with India - it means access to the Indian Ocean where the largest amount of goods, especially oil, travels through, and it also means democratic support. Previous to tensions, the two nations signed the Communications Capability and Security Agreement in which the two countries have bonded over their defense operations. India may realize that as the pressure from the US mounts against China, India is likely to have available grounds to gain where Indian companies could fill the places of where Chinese ones are squeezed out in the American market.

India is concerned with the ongoing OBOR project of China and finds itself encircled in the projects from Pakistan, to Sri Lanka, to Maldives. These countries all have traditionally been in India's sphere of influence. This may lead India to want to draw closer relations with the US to ward off the gain for dominance by China. As India is trying to find its footing in the world order and competitive advantage with its rapid growth and democracy, it also finds itself challenged by China. Both India and China are rising in the same region and India may seek additional support from the West as New Delhi is concerned that it will find itself lagging behind Beijing.

The US is vying for a positive relationship with India. No firm alliances or stances have been made either way by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as of yet. The engagement between the US and India, driven by the rise of an authoritarian China, has in recent years displayed a marked preference for working with convergences rather than harping on differences. The

issues before the two countries, whether relating to the sanctions or to the balance of trade, are not insurmountable. The US State Department aptly described the recent 2+2 deliberations in New Delhi as *“a historic milestone in the US-India relationship and an indication of the deepening strategic partnership between the United States and India, and India’s emergence as a global power and net security provider in the region”*. Imposing sanctions on such a strategic partner and regional security provider merely for having legacy linkages and strategic interests would be an aberration as threats of sanctions and strategic partnerships do not sit well with each other.

The island of Sri Lanka off of the southern coast of India is home to one of China’s OBOR projects and familiar with Chinese influence. President Mahinda Rajapaksa repeatedly turned to China and Chinese engineering companies for assistance and loans for the development of its Hambantota port project on which it had embarked. Debt accumulated quickly due to high interest loans from Chinese companies and lenders and the port has seen little traffic since its erection. Unable to pay back its debts, and to seek reimbursement, Sri Lanka was forced to lease the Hambantota port for the next 99 years to China. This Hambantota Port now provides Beijing access to the world’s busiest shipping lane, control of large infrastructure in the country, and the Sri Lankan Government now finds itself dependent on China. Sri Lanka is perhaps one of the greatest examples of the implications of China’s *‘Debt-trap Diplomacy’* advertised as OBOR. Sri Lanka has since revised and initiated a pull back with its relations with China.

In addition to economic turmoil, on 26 October, Sri Lanka fell into political crisis after the President, Maithripala Sirisena, suspended parliament in a power move to maintain governance. The US State Department in the last couple of weeks called on Sri Lanka’s President to immediately reconvene parliament. The statement is possibly a way for the US to become more involved in the politics of the Indo-Pacific. What’s more, this political shakeup in the Indian Ocean could be positive for China as it provides a second chance to China’s attempt to play a dominant role in the island, thus thwarting away any progress the US may have made here. The US most likely realizes this, hence the reason for the State Department’s commentary. But, a statement cannot live up to the amount of money China has sunk into the country and the entrapment Sri Lanka has fallen into. Bharat Gopalaswamy from the Atlantic Council think tank noted: *“The Trump administration has yet to find a realistic alternative to the sheer scale and availability of Chinese financing for infrastructure and development in the Indian Ocean. Until the US is both willing and able to engage with countries in the Indo-Pacific on an individual basis and to provide mutually beneficial development financing on a scale comparable to China’s, leaders pursuing rapid growth and infrastructure development will continue to turn to Beijing for opportunities, regardless of concerns about predatory or coercive lending behavior”*.

Myanmar has been featured heavily in the news this past year in respects to the Rohingya Crisis. The Rohingya are a stateless minority population, made up of mainly Muslims, that have lived in the northern Rakhine State for centuries, previously known as Burma. In 2017,

the Rohingya were forced out of their homes and has led to over 625,000 people to be displaced. By the end of 2017, the majority of the 1 million Rohingya known to live in the area had crossed over the border into Bangladesh where they still reside today in refugee camps. The Rohingya have been named by the UN as “*the most persecuted minority in the world*” because they have been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982 under the Myanmar Nationality Law. Due to multiple decades of oppression, several militant group, comprised of Rohingya men, have emerged and have acted out in forms of retaliation. Rebellious attacks from these militant groups are what led to their expulsion in 2017 from Rakhine. The oppression of the Rohingya and the mass populations stagnant in the refugee camps are worried by some experts to be ‘*hotbeds*’ for radicalization of the younger Rohingya.

China is deeply intertwined into the current state of Myanmar and increasingly plays an oversized-role in the peace process; there are several key investments in Myanmar within its OBOR and the two countries have signed a 15-point memorandum of understanding on the project. President Jinping wishes to finance \$7.5 billion into Myanmar’s Kyaukphyu Port to gain access to the Indian Ocean and provide China with an alternative route for any fuel imports from the Middle East that currently have to travel through a vulnerable Malacca Strait. Nevertheless, the role of China in Myanmar is often blurred due to acting as a negotiator of the conflicts but then also an implicit backer of both the State and militant groups. Perhaps it wants to guarantee both sides happy so as to not have either party interfere in its initiatives when required. Without peace, China knows it will be difficult to complete its projects. By arming militant groups in Myanmar, China hopes it will temper the Myanmar Government’s treatment of Chinese businesses present within the country. In 2011, former President Thein Sein sidelined one of China’s projects, the Myitsone hydro-power dam, and probably the Rohingya Crisis is a way China sees an opportunity to recharge the dam.

Western powers have condemned China’s actions in Myanmar. Punitive sanctions by the West have been on Myanmar since the end of the twentieth century which likely has pushed Myanmar close to China. Yet, Western nations have stalled or refrained from the Myanmar peace process thus far and China has emerged as the only country to get involved. Today, President Trump has paid little attention to the country. President Obama in his second term reached out to Myanmar and held a couple of meetings with Aung san Suu Kyi, back when she was renowned as a ‘*leader of democracy*’. Analysts wonder if the Trump administration’s lack of involvement with Myanmar has to do with Trump’s political instincts to undo his legacy in the region - many of Trump’s motivations behind policy are for this reason. This demonstrates further foreign policy in the region is determined based on President Trump’s singled interests. The Trump administration has done little to counterbalance China’s new growing influence over Myanmar even though the Pentagon wishes to engage the military there to lessen Beijing’s influence.

The former president of Maldives, Abdulla Yameen, who has been acknowledged as an authoritarian ruler, made many arrangements with China as part of its OBOR for the benefit of him and his Government with the promise of money and power. Under Yameen, Maldives entered into an imbalanced partnership with China in which China would loan money to the small island nation for the projects, but leave it in large unpayable debt and therefore at the mercy of Beijing - very much similar to Sri Lanka. The newly elected President Mohamed Solih has promised within his new term as President to conduct a critical review of the country's relationship with China, much to Beijing's disdain. This new President also hopes to restore relations with India, whom it has normally had strong partnerships with previous to Yameen, and to try to restore the balance of power with China. This will be difficult as Yameen arranged several large scale contracts with Chinese firms, like The Maldives International Airport expansion valued at \$830 million, and China will not want to give up such large projects situated in the Indian Ocean. Jinping has reached out to the new President of Maldives to reaffirm his intentions for a strong partnership. President Jinping has maintained a firm stance that these large projects are simply part of the OBOR and solely business and free from geo-political objectives. During the Boao Forum for Asia Jinping said, *"China has no geopolitical calculations, seeks no exclusionary blocs and imposes no business deals on others"*. But analysts and other countries are hesitant to believe this, especially the US. Everything Beijing has done thus far throughout the region has been too calculated and planned for there to be much speculation otherwise.

As China amounts more influence in the Indo-Pacific, the Trump administration, with all of its claims against the dislike of China, again scrambles for counteractions. Using its undying vow for democracy, the US State Department reached out and congratulated the new President Solih for his win, knowing one of his platforms was to revive liberal democracy within the country. However, this statement likely will not be enough to release China's grip. As far as policy, the Pentagon in Washington changed the name of the US Pacific Command to specifically the US Indo-Pacific Command to demonstrate more of a shift of alliances from China to India.

Conclusion

President Xi Jinping has a vision for his country and people, with a desire to be dominant among the world stage. This is evident through a series of strategies and diplomatic negotiations. The *One Belt One Road* initiative devised under the leadership of Jinping is probably the most powerful example of Beijing's thirst for global influence. The OBOR's roots grow through over 60 countries, and it cannot be denied that with these business ventures, grows other sorts of implications other than just the erection of infrastructure. Beijing establishes *'debt trap diplomacy'* for countries which become too entangled in OBOR developments, like Sri Lanka and Maldives; Beijing issues out loans with high interests rates most likely knowing a country cannot pay these back, and therefore gains political and economic influence when the country fails to do so. Countries in Africa as well have fallen

victim to this design and it is also warned by experts and the IMF that Pakistan is likely to fall victim as well. China is creating a vacuum of silent power, which is also supplemented by China's efforts to mediate international and domestic conflicts to ensure outcomes favorable for its goals.

In nations that China is unable to access through these means, the Government is able to enact other quiet means of influence. This demonstration is through the engagement of the Chinese diaspora living in Europe and the US. It was uncovered that in Universities in the US, the United Front Work Department funds Chinese national student groups and provides them with resources and assistance as long as the students do not talk about certain practices back in China and talk highly of the CCP government. They also have paid students to attend events held or attended by China in North America and Europe, like when the President makes visits abroad. The printing of newspapers in Chinese Mandarin language praising the Government handed out to nationals abroad maintains a level of control and ensures that nationals do not fall out of the influence of China.

All of these methods are strategic strategies to develop the large Asian country into a Global Superpower. Developing countries are desperate for funding, infrastructure, and stability and China offers these countries all of this but with stipulations unbeknownst to them. Although China does not carry the same negative connotation and conditions for aid Western countries might in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, which makes these countries more attuned to China's assistance, China has its own terms and conditions that are purposely left in the shadows.

President Trump's grandeur comments and attacks on Beijing are weighed down with naivety. The Trump administration's trade war is an attempt at a quick fix to break China's growth and dominance. The trade war and tariffs may slow China down, but it certainly will not stop China nor make Jinping concede to his terms. Trump's trade advisors have warned him there will be no 'quick fix'. Just last week Jinping reassured private companies operating in China that they have nothing to fear and he will make sure they are not affected by the ongoing dispute representing his commitment to his plan. What President Trump fails to realize is that Beijing has secured its place in the world order not solely by trade and international businesses and that stifling trade will only stall one part of the growth.

Trump's policies and international relations are isolationist which is the exact opposite of Jinping's. A lack of aid has been made available to distribute under the current US administration, as serious budget cuts have been inflicted on international development and relations to progress the rhetoric of "America First". This is a mistake as an increase in aid for international development and towards the country's foreign relations is probably the best way to fight America's battle against China. In addition, policy expertise typically is denigrated rather than respected which leads to misunderstanding and flawed methods for relations, thus resulting in encouragement of the tension. As America continues to revoke aid, pull out of agreements, and constrict its relations, China seeps into these gaps. This can be largely witnessed throughout the region of South Asia. If the US is concerned with the 'China

threat' and retaining its global dominance, its current strategies will not withstand the challenge. The American Government needs to understand that it is not putting "*America first*" that will help them achieve this, but expanding its global role will.

China and the US are both smart enough to understand that one cannot operate without the other - their economies are so deeply intertwined that the demise of one will mean the demise for the other as well as possibly a collapse of global standing. The dispute carries on while behind the scenes the two countries are still doing billions of dollars of business with each other. Neither will let the spat escalate to a level that will effect themselves or the other dramatically, nor on their own front, and therefore the rising subcontinent of South Asia becomes a perfect playground to carry out their war.

In a region where nations are vying for influence and a voice on the global platform, the US and China take advantage of this. Each is first and foremost looking after its own interests when establishing relationships with countries in South Asia to counteract the other and the region has fallen victim as the stage of international affairs and battled ground between the world's largest economies. Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and the others have to become aware of the intentions of both the US and China. Each nation in the region needs to ensure they have a balanced and equal partnership when seeking for outside assistance, which would entail mutual interests and gains.

The most prosperous outcome would be for the States of South Asia to realize that they all share the same mutual interests and needs, and that they require to work towards a unified and stable South Asia that would not need to seek outside aid for growth.



EFSAS

EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR
SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES
EXCELLENCE, GENUINENESS & AUTHENTICITY