

First a word:

Osgood Program Assistants are asked to choose topics, attend conferences and hearings, and then write short policy briefs on the topic for a hypothetical boss. Grayson Hunter-Williams chose as one of his topics the current state of tensions in U.S.-China Relations. Next to the Russia-Ukraine war, it is the hottest topic in D/C. in the summer of 2023. Grayson was a frequent guest at the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the U.S. Institute for Peace, the Woodrow Wilson Center, the Hudson Institute, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His challenge was to capture all these discussions into a short piece. Well, of course, his first challenge was to understand the many dimensions of the problem before he organized it into a coherent piece. Many discussions and much editing ensued.

In the Osgood Professional Development Program, our Associates learn how Washington works. They meet policy makers at conferences; they interact with a mentor; they learn who the policy players are inside and outside the government; and they begin to understand how students one day can become experts the next (or eventually). Moreover, like Grayson, they get to network with other Program Associates, interns around town, think tank specialists, and grad school admission offices. On average, they also write ten-fifteen policy papers that later may serve as grad school writing samples or the foundations for future academic research. They will also understand what to do if a boss ever tells them to “tell me all you know about this subject in less than five pages”!

Dr. Shelly

U.S.-China Relations

The purpose of this paper is to describe current U.S.-China relations and how they have developed. In the Post World War II era, the U.S. and its allies developed a system, the Liberal International Order, based on U.S. military dominance, economic liberalism, and spreading democracy. Today, China, with its growing economic and military strength, is the primary challenger to that system. China is a classic rising power. In recent years, China has been elaborating the vision of an entirely different world order that would reduce U.S. dominance and enhance China’s global role. This has led to increasing tension between the

two countries. Will these tensions lead to war, either cold or hot, or perhaps to mutually destructive economic nationalism?

Tensions between the U.S. and China have existed for decades but have escalated within the last five years. As an emerging power, China was already in competition with the U.S. as it rose economically and militarily. As Rush Doshi, the Biden administration's Deputy Senior Director for China and Taiwan, writes in his book "The Long Game," since the Cold War, China has been executing three strategies typical of an emerging power to establish its own power base. In the initial period after the Cold War, China pursued, first, a strategy of blunting the existing hegemon's (U.S.) formal and informal means of influence; and a second strategy of building their own forms of leverage over other states economically and militarily. In recent years, China has begun to move onto a third strategy, seeking to expand its own power regionally and even globally. The execution of this final strategy, as well as some effects it has brought, has contributed to the tensions seen today. Much of this third strategy played out both in the Asian region and in the Belt and Road initiative. Today, The U.S. is clearly the status quo power in direct competition with the rising power of a revisionist China. So, say all the pundits.

Concern and apprehension within the United States revolve around Chinese economic nationalism, aggressive behavior in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, and global Chinese economic programs like the Belt and Road Initiative. The primary U.S. concerns over the Belt and Road initiative focus on its potential to spread Chinese influence in a way that (i) strengthens China's political influence and military reach, and (ii) may eliminate norms regarding human rights, anti-corruption efforts, and other

governance reforms. According to the U.S. view, Belt and Road projects can give China leverage over the recipients of aid and allow China access for its military, for example, through rights to strategically placed ports. The U.S. also fears that Chinese economic initiatives threaten debt traps and foster economic arrangements that only benefit China in the long run. In the Liberal International Order, there is an articulated vision for development that mandates that developing states -t embrace a rules-based economic order. The U.S. fully embraces this approach. Conversely, China's economic initiatives require little to no political or economic conditions, other than debt repayments. China alleges that this approach honors developing states' sovereignty even while it enhances China's own interests financially and politically. These opposing approaches demonstrate the inherent contradiction between the two world views.

China has, in turn, accused the U.S. of mainly seeking to contain, or even encircle, China. The U.S. states that it is not opposed to China's economic growth and is not hostile to the Chinese people. However, for several years, U.S. has adopted economic and strategic policies that China regards as resisting Chinese ambitions, These include tariffs, sanctions, and strengthening of its military alliances. Militarily, China views U.S. alliances within East Asia as an attempt to surround it.

Many U.S. regional allies (Japan, Australia, and South Korea) also view China's actions, such as military drills in the Taiwan Strait and building forward military bases in the South China Sea, as provocative. Other small and medium-sized states act to hedge their bets in this competition between two superpowers. The U.S. effort has led regional states increasingly to discuss military readiness and, in some cases, seek security aid from the

United States, further alarming China. Additionally, the COVID-19 era heightened Sino-American tensions and led the U.S., under Trump, to impose tariffs on China even as supply chain disruptions led to concern over economic reliance on China. The Biden administration has maintained these Trump-era restrictions. In fact, in the U.S., there is now a debate on whether to decouple from China, or at least to de-risk economic ties with China.

In the face of all these challenges, the current era of relations is still unfolding. Wise voices suggest that economic interdependence with China is both too ingrained and too beneficial to destroy completely. The nature of what the Chinese want to accomplish and what the U.S. wants to do concerning China cannot be simply hypothetical. It needs to be negotiated full stop. From the U.S. perspective, it will need to continue to pursue policies that promote U.S. and its allies' interests while coping with Chinese challenges, being careful not to provoke the very conflict it seeks to prevent. Secretary of State Blinken refers to this dynamic as cooperation when possible, and competition when necessary. Panelists and experts in Washington assert, that to avoid direct conflict, some form of *modus vivendi* must be the ultimate outcome of this current struggle between the U.S. and China.