



The PRC-USA Rivalry and Taiwan

By

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The People's Republic of China (PRC) under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a formidable force locked in a global competition with the United States for power and leadership. The PRC's aim, since its creation 75 years ago, is to secure its autocratic governance at the minimum and, at the maximum, to recenter and reorder the world in its image.

In this still frequently neglected or covered-up existential rivalry, the two sides face equally monumental but decidedly asymmetrical consequences. Should Beijing lose, the CCP will likely fall and fade. The Chinese nation, people, and state, even with the same name, will survive and likely thrive. Should Washington lose, however, not only will the American system of government likely fail, but the American way of life and national independence will diminish as American power and influence is superseded by a domineering PRC.

After long delays, hesitations, and self-delusions, a rare American consensus emerged to focus on the epic PRC-USA competition and fending off China's effort to spread illiberal Chinese power. Given its vast well of resources, extensive network of alliances, great pool of talent, still functional democratic decision-making mechanism, and vibrant marketplace of ideas, the United States is coming up with cost-effective measures to win this competition, likely cheaper and more peaceful than what was required during the Cold War.

Critically, the United States should aim to achieve three hierarchical objectives in the PRC-USA race. They are ranked in descending order of importance. First, prevent the CCP from reordering the world by taking over global leadership. Second, prepare for but deter an all-out war with the PRC. Third, work toward a sociopolitical and ideological transformation of the PRC into a constructive peer. In the end, the US must ensure that Beijing is unwilling and/or unable to replace American leadership in the world.

The United States and its allies should curb the idealistic but toxic enthusiasm for globalization and world governance. The evolving ideals of the right to intervene (RTI) in other sovereign countries for the responsibility to protect (RTP) other country's citizens, for example, should remain an inspiring ideal rather than a legal norm. Extremely rare and absolutely necessary cases of RTI and RTP are acceptable.

Americans must unapologetically strengthen the United States by maintaining dominance in economics, military power, education, and innovation. It must also remain a nation that is admired for its freedoms at home. It is in the greater interest of the world (including the Chinese people) to put America First, make America strong, rebuild America back better, and let America lead again. These campaign slogans were not only useful for presidential campaigns in 2016, 2020, and 2024, but they are important in reminding the rest of the world what is in their own best interest—a strong America.

These ideas should be delinked from the shortsightedness of isolationism and disassociated from any particular politician. The US must succeed in the international competition for power. It must also use its immense power judiciously to be ever more cost-effective.



A quick look at Taiwan may be a good illustration. Taiwan is critical for Beijing and the primary point of contention in the PRC-USA rivalry. The ROC (Republic of China) was a major US ally after World War II. However, the ROC's international status was literally traded away by the United States over 40 years ago. The desire to enlist the PRC in the fight to win the Cold War against the Soviet Union proved more important.

Taiwan subsequently evolved to become the first democratic Chinese polity of and, in many ways, a leader across Asia. It has also drifted away from the monolithic Chinese world, to seek its own self-rule, autonomy, and independence.

The CCP, for its own political interest rather than the Chinese national interest, desires to absorb Taiwan with bribery, tricks, intimidation and force. Should Beijing accomplish that goal, it would achieve a major objective of its "great power" strategy, making a giant leap to dominate the Asia-Pacific and score a significant victory over the US and its allies.

The United States must not let Taiwan fall to Beijing. This is not because of the island's beauty (its old name Formosa means beautiful island in Portuguese). Nor is it because of the advanced microchips that Taiwan makes. It is because the United States cannot allow the CCP to win the PRC-USA rivalry. American interests and the interests of a free world dictate that the US must ensure Beijing does not take Taiwan over the will of the Taiwanese people.

Without fundamental sociopolitical reform at home, even peaceful unification of Taiwan and the PRC should be objectionable to the United States. It sends the wrong signal to every nation watching the outcome of this competition. Winning the PRC-USA rivalry is much more important than the Beijing-Taipei dispute.

The United States must use its power well in defending Taiwan against the PRC. Between peaceful unification of the island with the Chinese Mainland in a framework of democratic federation on the one end, and Sino-American military conflict in response to an invasion of an independent Taiwan on the other end, there are many options. The US can employ numerous and inexpensive options like destroying the "Great Firewall of China," providing smart weapons to Taiwan, fighting at the time and place of American choosing, and altering the nuclear balance in East Asia. The list can go on.

Imagination, wisdom, persistence, and perseverance, more than mere force and material power, will enable the United States to safeguard world order. The Taiwanese people are counting on an American victory in the PRC-USA rivalry.

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