

A CHILL IN U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

A binary choice between the U.S. and China is likely to test India's capacity to maintain strategic and decisional autonomy

A slew of recent announcements on China by U.S. President Donald Trump is a clear indication that the competition between the U.S. and China is likely to sharpen in the post-COVID world. On May 29, the Trump administration said it would revoke Hong Kong's special trade status under U.S. law. The administration also passed an order limiting the entry of certain Chinese graduate students and researchers who may have ties to the People's Liberation Army. The U.S. President has also ordered financial regulators to closely examine Chinese firms listed in U.S. stock markets, and warned those that do not comply with U.S. laws could be delisted.

Complicit in China's rise:

Americans have had a strange fascination for China ever since the early 1900s when Protestant missionaries decided that it was God's work to bring salvation to the Chinese. Books like *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck and *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow in the 1930s romanticised the country. Even after the Chinese communists seized power, the Americans hoped to cohabit with Mao Zedong in a world under U.S. hegemony. The Chinese allowed them to believe this and extracted their price. U.S. President Richard Nixon gave China the international acceptability it craved in return for being admitted to Mao's presence in 1972; President Jimmy Carter terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to normalise relations with China in 1978; President George H.W. Bush washed away the sins of Tiananmen in 1989 for ephemeral geopolitical gain; and Bill Clinton, who as a presidential candidate had criticised Bush for indulging the Chinese, proceeded as President to usher the country into the World Trade Organization at the expense of American business. All American administrations since the 1960s have been complicit in China's rise in the unrealised hope that it will become a 'responsible stakeholder' under Pax Americana.

Disguising its real purpose:

The Chinese are hard-nosed and unsentimental about the U.S. They have always pursued America with a selfish purpose, albeit couched in high principle. They have spoken words that the Americans wanted to hear — anti-Soviet rhetoric during the Cold War and market principles thereafter — to disguise their real purpose of thwarting U.S. hegemony. Ever since Cold Warrior John Foster Dulles spoke in 1958 of weaning China and other "satellites" away from the Soviets through regime change, known as "peaceful evolution", every Chinese leader from Chairman Mao to President Xi Jinping has been clear-eyed that the U.S. represents an existential threat to the continued supremacy of the communist regime. Mao put it best, when he told high-ranking leaders in November 1959, that the "U.S. is attempting to carry out its aggression and expansion with a much more deceptive tactic... In other words, it wants to keep its order and change our system." (Memoirs, Chinese leader Bo Yibo). The collapse of the Soviet Union only reinforced this view and strengthened China's resolve to resist by creating its own parallel universe. China is building an alternate trading system (the Belt and Road Initiative); a multilateral banking system under its control (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank); its own global positioning system (BeiDou); digital payment platforms (WeChat Pay and Alipay); a world-class digital network (Huawei 5G); cutting-edge technological processes in sunrise industries; and a modern military force. It is doing this under the noses of the Americans and some of it with the financial and technological resources of the West.

Voices of caution have been few and far between, among them political scientist John Mearsheimer, who wrote in 2005 that the rise of China would not be peaceful at all, but the world chose to believe General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Hu Jintao's assurances about "peaceful rise". When satellite evidence showed that China was building military installations in the South China Sea, China's Southeast Asian neighbours and the U.S. preferred to believe assurances to the contrary given by Mr. Xi on the lawns of the White House in 2015.

It is only under Mr. Trump that the Americans are finally acknowledging the uneasy fact that the Chinese are not graven in their image. He has called China out on trade practices. He has called China out on 5G. It was Mr. Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy document that, perhaps for the first time, clubbed China along with Russia as a challenge to American power, influence and interests. His recent China-specific restrictions on trade and legal migration are, possibly, only the beginning of a serious re-adjustment.

A full-spectrum debate on China is now raging across the U.S. Former White House Chief of Staff Steve Bannon declared that the U.S. is already at war with China. Others like diplomat Richard Haass and former president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, warn that a new Cold War will be a mistake. Scholar Julian Gewirtz, in his brilliant essay, 'The Chinese Reassessment of Interdependence', talks about a similar process under way in Beijing. Both sides are acutely aware how closely their economies are tied together: from farm to factory, the U.S. is heavily dependent on supply chains in China and the Chinese have been unable to break free of the dollar. If Mr. Trump's wish is to disentangle China's supply chains, Mr. Xi is equally determined to escape from the U.S. 'chokehold' on technology. To what extent the de-coupling is possible is yet to be determined, but one thing is inevitable, India will become part of the collateral damage.

The Hong Kong question:

Will Hong Kong become a game-changer in the post-COVID world? China's decision to enact the new national security law for Hong Kong has been condemned in unison by the U.S. and its Western allies as an assault on human freedoms. Why is this significant? The points of divergence, even dispute, between them have so far been in the material realm. With Hong Kong, the U.S.-China rivalry may, possibly, be entering the ideological domain. For some time now there are reports about Chinese interference in the internal affairs of democracies. Countries in the West have tackled this individually, always mindful of not jeopardising their trade with China. Hong Kong may be different. It is not only a bastion for Western capitalism in the East, but more importantly the torch-bearer of Western democratic ideals. Think of it as a sort of Statue of Liberty; it holds aloft the torch of freedom and democracy for all those who pass through Hong Kong en route to China. This is an assault on beliefs, so to speak.

This comes on the back of not unreasonable demands that China should come clean on its errors of omission in the early days of COVID-19, when greater transparency and quicker action might have prevented, or at least mitigated, the pandemic. In the months ahead, more information may become public, from sources inside China itself, about the shortcomings of the regime, that will further fuel a debate on the superiority of the Chinese Model as an alternative to democracy. Will this form the ideological underpinning for the birth of a new Cold War? That will depend on who wins in Washington in November; on whether profit will again trump politics in Europe; and on how skilfully the Wolf Warriors of China can manipulate global public opinion. The lines are beginning to be drawn between the Americans on the one side and China on the other. A binary choice is likely to test to the limit India's capacity to maintain strategic and decisional autonomy.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **chill** (noun) – a sudden & unpleasant feeling (of fear).
- ❖ **binary** (noun) – something having two parts.
- ❖ **autonomy** (noun) – self-rule, sovereignty, self-determination, independence/freedom.
- ❖ **slew of** (noun) – a large number of, lot, range.
- ❖ **revoke** (verb) – cancel, repeal/reverse, abrogate, nullify.
- ❖ **special trade status (Hong Kong)** (noun) – The special status that Washington grants Hong Kong acknowledged this difference. Under the United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992, Hong Kong is treated differently by U.S. law when it comes to financial transactions, immigration and trade. Under the special status, the U.S. dollar can be freely exchanged with the Hong Kong dollar, which makes the city a particularly attractive place for American companies to do business. Hong Kong gets preferential treatment on trade, meaning little to no tariffs or other costs. Americans enjoy visa-free travel, making it easy for business executives to come and go.
- ❖ **tie** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **missionaries** (noun) – preacher, priest.
- ❖ **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** (noun) – People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the armed forces of the country of China and Communist Party of China (CPC). It is one of the largest military forces in the world.
- ❖ **stock market** (noun) – equity market, share market, a stock exchange. It is where traders buy and sell shares of companies on a public exchange.
- ❖ **comply with** (verb) – abide by, adhere to, conform to.
- ❖ **delist** (verb) – remove from a list.
- ❖ **complicit** (adjective) – associated/partnered/involved with others (mostly in a wrongful/illegal activity).
- ❖ **fascination** (noun) – interest, preoccupation, passion, obsession.
- ❖ **protestant** (adjective) – relating to the second-largest form of Christianity. (the Catholic is the largest form of Christianity).
- ❖ **God's work** (phrase) – Work in accordance with the will of God.
- ❖ **salvation** (noun) – lifeline, preservation, conservation (from harm, ruin & loss).

- ❖ **romanticise** (verb) – promote, enhance, increase, augment, boost.
- ❖ **seize** (verb) – take hold of, snatch, grab, capture.
- ❖ **cohabit** (verb) – live together, co-exist.
- ❖ **hegemony** (noun) – leadership, dominance, authority.
- ❖ **extract** (verb) – force, elicit, wrest, obtain (by threat).
- ❖ **extract a price** (phrase) – to draw forth or pull something (a confession, money, etc.) forward against a person’s will.
- ❖ **crave** (verb) – long for, yearn for, aspire to, seek.
- ❖ **diplomatic** (adjective) – (delicate & sensitive) consular, foreign-policy, political.
- ❖ **normalise** (verb) – modify, alter, regulate, balance.
- ❖ **wash away** (phrasal verb) – to remove, get rid of something completely.
- ❖ **Tiananmen Square Incident/Protest** (noun) – the famous landmark gathering and protest by a large number of Chinese youth, that started on April 15, 1989 and was forcibly suppressed on June 4, 1989 at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China. The popular national movement inspired by the Beijing protests is sometimes called the ‘89 Democracy Movement. In this massive pro-democracy protest, many (in hundreds) were killed in a brutal clampdown by the communist authorities. It is commonly known as the June Fourth Incident.
- ❖ **ephemeral** (adjective) – transitory, short-lived, momentary/brief.
- ❖ **geopolitical** (adjective) – relating to the study of the geographical factors (a country’s position on the earth, size, climate, and natural resources & etc.,) in world politics and inter-state relations.
- ❖ **indulge** (verb) – become involved in (usually an undesirable activity).
- ❖ **usher (in)** (verb) – start, begin, initiate, introduce.
- ❖ **at the expense of** (phrase) – sacrifice, cost, loss.
- ❖ **stakeholder** (noun) – a person with an interest in something.
- ❖ **Pax Americana** (noun) – Latin for “American Peace”; The period of relative peace in the Western world since the end of World War II in 1945, coinciding with the military and economic dominance of the United States.
- ❖ **disguise** (verb) – camouflage, conceal, hide, cover up.
- ❖ **hard-nosed** (adjective) – tough-minded, realistic, pragmatic/practical.
- ❖ **pursue** (verb) – engage in, conduct, follow, carry on.
- ❖ **albeit** (conjunction) – though, even though, however.
- ❖ **couch** (verb) – express, convey, communicate.
- ❖ **rhetoric** (noun) – the art of speaking or writing effectively & persuasively or impressively (but, often lacking substance); bombast, loftiness, hyperbole/extravagant language.
- ❖ **The Cold War** (noun) – The Cold War was a state of political and military tension after World War II between powers in the Western (Capitalist) Bloc and powers in the Eastern (Soviet) Bloc.
- ❖ **thereafter** (adverb) – after that, subsequently.
- ❖ **thwart** (verb) – prevent, hamper/hinder, obstruct/block.
- ❖ **wean away from** (phrasal verb) – to detach, disconnect, separate someone from depending on something.
- ❖ **clear-eyed** (adjective) – far-sighted, wise/clever, intelligent, insightful.
- ❖ **existential** (adjective) – relating to existence.
- ❖ **supremacy** (noun) – dominion, power, influence.
- ❖ **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
- ❖ **aggression** (noun) – hostility, belligerence, combativeness, warmongering, hawkishness.
- ❖ **deceptive** (adjective) – misleading, illusory, distorted.
- ❖ **memoir** (noun) – autobiography, life story, recollections/experiences.
- ❖ **reinforce** (verb) – strengthen, fortify, bolster up.
- ❖ **resolve** (noun) – decision, resolution, commitment.
- ❖ **parallel** (adjective) – similar, related, resembling.
- ❖ **multilateral** (adjective) – involving many different countries (in which all WTO member countries are party to the agreement).
- ❖ **cutting-edge** (adjective) – state-of-the-art, innovational, pioneering, revolutionary.
- ❖ **sunrise industry** (noun) – a new and very fast growing industry (e.g. the telecom industry in 90s).
- ❖ **under someone’s nose** (phrase) – something happens right in front of someone, but that person is not seeing it or even if that person sees it, could not do anything to prevent it from happening.
- ❖ **few and far between** (phrase) – not happening frequently; infrequent, rare, occasional; insufficient, negligible, meagre.
- ❖ **at all** (phrase) – conceivably, in any way, by any means.
- ❖ **peaceful rise** (noun) – “China’s peaceful rise” or sometimes referred to as “China’s peaceful development” was an official policy in China under the leadership of Hu Jintao, Former General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. The term generally suggests that China seeks to avoid unnecessary international confrontation.

- ❖ **installation** (noun) – centre, facility, establishment,
- ❖ **to the contrary** (phrase) – in an opposite manner.
- ❖ **acknowledge** (verb) – admit, accept, declare, realize, confess.
- ❖ **grave** (adjective) – terrible, awful, alarming, gloomy.
- ❖ **call out** (phrasal verb) – criticize someone for something (bad/incorrect) publicly and ask them to justify/explain it.
- ❖ **interest** (noun) – benefit, advantage.
- ❖ **full-spectrum** (adjective) – all-inclusive, comprehensive, extensive.
- ❖ **rage** (verb) – be at its height, be uncontrollable; reach a high degree of intensity.
- ❖ **diplomat** (noun) – envoy, consul, ambassador.
- ❖ **interdependence** (noun) – the condition of being dependent on each other.
- ❖ **under way** (phrase) – going on, continuing, in progress.
- ❖ **supply chain** (noun) – a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final buyer.
- ❖ **break free** (phrase) – escape from.
- ❖ **disentangle** (verb) – disconnect, disengage, detach.
- ❖ **chokehold** (noun) – an act of putting one's hands around someone's neck tightly to restrict/control him.
- ❖ **de-coupling** (noun) – separation, detachment, disengagement, dissociation.
- ❖ **inevitable** (adjective) – sure to happen, unavoidable, unpreventable.
- ❖ **collateral** (adjective) – incidental, accidental, unintended, resultant.
- ❖ **collateral damage** (noun) – any death, injury, or other damage inflicted that is an unintended result of military operations.
- ❖ **National Security Bill (for Hong Kong)** (noun) – a draft by the Chinese Legislature under which it will write a new national security law for Hong Kong that would prohibit "acts of political secession (separation from a federation), subversion (overthrow/undermining government), sedition (illegal rebellion against government) that seriously threaten national security and foreign intervention".
- ❖ **condemn** (verb) – criticize, censure, rebuke/reprimand.
- ❖ **unison** (noun) – simultaneously, at the same time, together.
- ❖ **assault** (noun) – attack, violence, incursion.
- ❖ **divergence** (noun) – difference, dissimilarity/ variance; deviation.
- ❖ **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
- ❖ **realm** (noun) – area, field, domain (of activity).
- ❖ **rivalry** (noun) – opposition, antagonism, friction, enmity.
- ❖ **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.
- ❖ **domain** (noun) – field, area, sector.
- ❖ **interference** (noun) – intervention, meddling, unwarranted involvement.
- ❖ **mindful** (adjective) – aware of, conscious of, heedful of.
- ❖ **jeopardise** (verb) – put at risk, put in danger, threaten.
- ❖ **bastion** (noun) – defender, supporter, guard, protector.
- ❖ **capitalism** (noun) – an economic system based on the private ownership; private enterprise, private ownership.
- ❖ **torch-bearer** (noun) – advocate, proponent, promoter.
- ❖ **ideal** (noun) – criterion, standard, yardstick.
- ❖ **sort of** (phrase) – to some extent, somewhat, somehow, slightly.
- ❖ **aloft** (adverb) – upwards, up, on high, higher, into the air.
- ❖ **pass through** (verb) – proceed, move, progress, drive.
- ❖ **en route** (adverb) – on the way, in transit, on the move.
- ❖ **so to speak** (phrase) – in a manner of speaking, in a way, to some extent.
- ❖ **on the back of** (phrase) – as a result of, after/subsequent; in support of.
- ❖ **come clean** (phrase) – tell the truth, be completely honest, tell all about something.
- ❖ **omission** (noun) – negligence, something neglected.
- ❖ **mitigate** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease, make less severe.
- ❖ **shortcoming** (noun) – fault, flaw, imperfection/ defect.
- ❖ **fuel** (verb) – stimulate, encourage, intensify (an emotion).
- ❖ **superiority** (noun) – advantage, dominance, primacy.
- ❖ **underpinning** (noun) – basis, fundamental, core (ideas/motives).
- ❖ **the wolf warrior (diplomacy)** (noun) – dubbed "wolf-warrior diplomacy," this new approach seems popular inside China and reinforces a presumed transition of Chinese diplomacy from conservative, passive, and low-key to assertive, proactive, and high-profile. It describes offensives by Chinese diplomat to defend China's national interests, often in confrontational ways.
- ❖ **manipulate** (verb) – misrepresent, falsify, distort