

During the 2016 US presidential campaign, then-Republican candidate Donald Trump repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction with the way that the US government dealt with China, especially in trade, and vowed to change this disadvantageous situation if he won.

Many foreign policy experts warned that the tycoon's remarks revealed how shallow his global views were and his unfamiliarity with the complex and highly interdependent relations between the world's No. 1 and No. 2 economies.

More than two years since Trump's inauguration, there are still experts who believe that his "maximum pressure" toward China will damage the US' long-term interests.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Trump's attitude toward China and the ever-changing global structure are largely in line with the US governments of the past two decades, which tried to shape the world order to meet their interests — but with a firmer stance.

During his first term, then-US president George W. Bush, well aware of a rising China that posed a serious threat to the peace and stability of the west Pacific, in 2001 referred to China as a "strategic competitor."

Bush highly valued the importance of Taiwan's strategic position. In a television interview, he said that the US would do "whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself" in the event of an attack by China.

However, the US was forced to change its security priorities after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, focusing its attention on the "war on terror" in the following years, which consumed substantial national resources.

At the same time, China accelerated its military buildup in line with its rapid economic development.

Faced with China's increasing ambition to challenge the US-led liberal international order, former US president Barack Obama's administration adopted "pivot to Asia" and later "Asia rebalance" strategies, seeking closer cooperation with regional allies and strengthening military deployments in Asia-Pacific region.

When he was preparing to run for US president in 1967, Richard Nixon wrote: "The world cannot be safe until China changes."

After becoming the president in 1969 and opening the door to China in 1972, Nixon and succeeding US administrations believed that US engagement with Beijing, including introducing and integrating China into the international community and helping its economic development, would encourage it to reform politically and become an open society.

This has proved to be wishful thinking and totally wrong.

A richer, more powerful, modern China has become less tolerant; more hostile to dissents, minority groups and the press; and more aggressive toward its neighbors.

Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平), after grabbing absolute power last year by repealing presidential term limits, has become the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong (毛泽东).

Motivated by China's economic leverage, Xi called on the nation to become "a global leader in terms of comprehensive national strength and international influence" by the mid-century and touts China's development model as a "new option for other countries." In short, it is what he called the "China dream."

However, China did not become an ambitious and assertive nation only in recent years; its transformation was the product of a long-term, stealthy plan.

As Michael Pillsbury, a top China expert in the US government, wrote in his book *The Hundred-Year Marathon*

: “I discovered proposals by Chinese hawks to the Chinese leadership to mislead and manipulate American policymakers to obtain intelligence and military, technological and economic assistance... Then China will set up a world order that will be fair to China, a world without American global supremacy, and revise the US-dominated economic and geological world order.”

His findings confirmed a comment made by former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀): “It is China’s intention to be the greatest power in the world, and to be accepted as China, not as an honorary member of the West.”

The evidence, Pillsbury said in his book, indicates that the views from the Chinese hardliners are not rare or insignificant, but are part of mainstream Chinese geostrategic thought.

He concluded that the US has been wrong for the past four decades in assuming that engagement with China would encourage it to cooperate with the West and set it on the path to democracy.

Surprisingly, a recent *Washington Post* opinion piece, titled “China is not an enemy,” still sticks to the Nixon-era view that engaging with China is the best approach because “China’s engagement in the international system is essential to the system’s survival and to effective action on common problems.”

The op-ed, authored by five senior China experts and former US officials, and endorsed by 95 others in the academic and diplomatic communities, claimed that there are many moderate Chinese officials and elites who support a cooperative approach with the West, and that “Washington’s adversarial stance toward Beijing weakens the influence of those voices in favor of assertive nationalists.”

These mistaken beliefs are erroneous, misleading and dangerous.

Under the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) authoritarian regime, all media are controlled by the government and people cannot freely express their views, but only those that meet the CCP's needs. The situation has seriously deteriorated since Xi came to power in 2012.

Rather than providing specific and practical methods to curb China's illegal trade practices, military expansion in the South China Sea, the threat of use of force against Taiwan, human rights violations, with more than 1.5 million Uighur imprisoned in Xinjiang, etc, the op-ed only vaguely maintains that "these challenges require a firm and effective US response, but the current approach to China is fundamentally counterproductive."

Fortunately, the Trump administration and bipartisan members of Congress have a different view.

Trump began regular tweeting about China in 2011, and he has called the country an "enemy" of the US at least seven times.

Through years of observation, he clearly understands that Beijing poses a serious threat to US security. While maintaining a friendly tone when referring to and dealing with Xi, Trump has consistently kept a hardline posture against China.

The US Department of Defense's *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* and the White House's *National Security Strategy*

identified China as a revisionist power. The former claimed that: China "is willing to accept friction in the pursuit of a more expansive set of political, economic and security interests."

Over the past two years, the US House of Representatives and the Senate have shown robust support for Taiwan. Last year, three pro-Taiwan bills — the Taiwan Travel Act, the National Defense Authorization Act and the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act — were passed by Congress and signed by Trump.

US-China ties and Taiwan safety

Written by Tu Ho-ting 涂浩庭
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These bills encourage senior official visits between the US and Taiwan, US arms sales to Taiwan and measures to strengthen Taiwan's security. This year, at least two pro-Taiwan bills are being discussed or have been passed by both the House and the Senate.

In a conference last month held by National Committee on American Foreign Policy, which was attended by former US officials, China experts and Chinese officials responsible for the Taiwan issue, the heated debate revealed a big gap between the US and China regarding Taiwan.

Chinese participants accused the US of testing China's bottom line on Taiwan.

"In the worst case, China might feel compelled to take action based on its 2005 'Anti-Secession' law," one participant said.

However, US participants pointed out that Beijing's lack of understanding of Taiwanese democracy and efforts to destabilize its democratic processes were inimical to cross-strait relations.

Emphasizing their support for Taiwan's efforts to defend itself and possibly intervening militarily if it faced a Chinese attack, they were also worried that China would use KMT candidates to fulfill their interests in Taiwan.

Bush once referred to Taiwan as "a beacon of democracy to Asia and the world." However, Taiwan's security is more precarious than ever, as it faces a threat from a totalitarian regime that believes democracy and Chinese civilization cannot coexist.

In the lead-up to the presidential election, the Taiwanese government, while having strong support from its democratic ally, should forestall any Chinese infiltration and cautiously reject economic cooperation and cultural exchanges with China that come with strings attached to safeguard its freedom and keep this beacon of democracy shining.

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