

Former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger was present at the creation of contemporary US-China relations and assiduously nurtured them through over half a century of eight US administrations and five Chinese rulers.

However, now he is concerned that the fruition of his long-entrenched engagement policies could lead to a Sino-US war with “catastrophic” global consequences. Yet, in a Wilson Center interview in September 2018, Kissinger acknowledged no inherent flaw in the approach that strengthened China’s communist regime and weakened the West.

“[A]t the beginning, we made a number of deals, which, in purely economic terms, seemed to be balanced in favor of China ... because we thought growth in Chinese strength compensated for that imbalance in the Soviet Union. We felt we had an obligation, for the preservation of peace and stability, not to make the transformation of China such a goal that it would stop everything else,” Kissinger said.

However, he and former US president Richard Nixon also made a consequential security “deal”: The US would show good faith by withdrawing the Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Strait and begin removing forces from Taiwan, in exchange for China allowing Nixon’s historic visit.

Kissinger now argues that mounting China tensions are not due to shortsighted policies, but because of unpredictable extrinsic factors such as sophisticated new technologies and an unsophisticated foreign policy approach during former US president Donald Trump’s administration, which US President Joe Biden’s team continued.

Consistent with his ultra-realist rationale, he eschews the role of ideology or personality — except on the US side — relying instead on the mechanistic geostrategic model of “rising power” versus “established power” dynamics.

The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with its special worldview seems of no interest to Kissinger: “I don’t consider China a communist state, no. I know that sounds paradoxical, but it’s my view.”

## Kissinger's China policy mistakes

Written by Joseph Bosco

Monday, 19 September 2022 06:05

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The US might as well be confronted with a modern version of the Ming Empire, rather than a protege and former junior partner of Joseph Stalin's US-hating Soviet Union, now reconstituted as a "no-limits strategic partner" of Russian President Vladimir Putin's US-hating revanchist Russia.

Applying the realpolitik model, Kissinger accepts Beijing's denial of any intention to replace the US as global hegemon, seeking only its rightful place at the international table. "My analysis of Chinese purposes is not that China is determined to achieve world domination, whatever that means," he told Chatham House in March last year.

The noted historian and strategic thinker seems not to hear in China's claim the echoes of Adolf Hitler's assurances in the 1930s.

Strategic insouciance shows in his description of Washington's and Beijing's approaches to negotiations as "pragmatism" versus "process."

"The Americans have a list of things that they want to fix in the immediate future; the Chinese have an objective towards which they want to work. So we both can learn from each other," he said.

His statement appears oblivious to China's objective since the communists took power. Starting with Mao Zedong's (毛泽东) wars of national liberation, through its co-invasion of South Korea in 1950 and combat involvement in South Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, Beijing has been committed to defeating US interests and values at every opportunity and in every strategic venue — economic, military, technological and geopolitical.

Western experts, following Kissinger's lead, are quick to invoke China's "century of humiliation," but fail to recall more recent Chinese history. For example, an intelligence official told a large Pentagon meeting in the 2000s that Chinese forces had never fought against Americans.

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For five decades, Kissinger held important access and influence with Republican and Democratic administrations and was able to preserve the imbalanced framework of the US-China relations he negotiated with Mao and Zhou Enlai (周 恩 来), and reinforced with each of their successors.

That changed with the arrival of Trump's team of clear-eyed realists determined to arrest and reverse the decline of US power vis-a-vis Russia and China. For the first time, Kissinger's representations of benign Chinese intentions fell on deaf ears. "I wish I had been invited, on some occasion, to tell President Trump ... about my strategic views of that relationship," he lamented at the Wilson Center in September 2018.

He said that our problem "is not to find allies around the world with which to confront China ... This particular approach of beginning a new administration with finding an additional ally against a country with which we should have a cooperative relationship is simply not correct ... Neither China nor America need allies to fight each other."

In May last year, Kissinger compared the China policies of the Trump and Biden administrations: "The language still has an adversarial character, but I think the circumstances are better now, [not] as if the isolation of China was the principal objective of American foreign policy."

Last November, he told CNN that "everyone wants to be a China hawk," although not Kissinger himself.

After Biden again said the US would defend Taiwan against a Chinese attack, Kissinger told the World Economic Forum that "the United States should not by subterfuge or by a gradual process develop something of a 'two-China' solution, but that China will continue to exercise the patience that has been exercised up until now."

These words evoked his 2007 warning to Taiwan at the Asia Society: "China will not wait forever."

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Kissinger also urges a downgrading of the Taiwan issue in favor of the larger US-China agenda: "A direct confrontation should be avoided and Taiwan cannot be the core of the negotiations because it is between China and the United States."

However, he has repeatedly recounted that, in 1972, Beijing would discuss nothing else until the Taiwan question was resolved to its satisfaction.

In May last year, he opposed a human rights focus as a distraction and an unwelcome threat to the survival of the CCP: "We should not use the human rights issue as a deliberate issue to undermine the existing structures, because if we do that, we will be in a permanent confrontation."

However, the US has been in a permanent confrontation with China, always on the defensive. Given the consummate failure of Kissinger's engagement policies and the need to avoid all-out kinetic war, going on the offensive to achieve peaceful regime change in China is the only escape from the world's dangerous dilemma. An overt and covert information campaign directed at the Chinese population, with whom the US has no quarrel, urgently needs to begin.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2022/09/19](#)