The Pew Research Center released results from a public opinion poll in July of 2023 which found that 50% of Americans view the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the United States’ greatest threat. Only 17% of Americans (nearly a threefold difference) viewed Russia as a more formidable opponent. This fearful sentiment has not always been directed squarely at the PRC. In 2007, the same poll revealed that Iran and Iraq topped the third place PRC as America’s chief adversary. Tensions between the U.S. and the PRC have dominated mainstream media coverage over the last decade. The “new situation” which Chinese officials perceived in 2013 lead President Xi to recast the “China Dream” on his own terms. It has been a busy decade: a third term as President for Party Chairman Xi, island-building in the South China Sea, global infrastructure investments through the Belt and Road Initiative, and silencing dissent in Hong Kong. President Xi’s actions have understandably sparked fear for many observers.

According to domestic government satisfaction measures, PRC citizens do not view these events as negatively. According to a Harvard University survey, over 95% of Chinese citizen respondents were either relatively satisfied or highly satisfied with Beijing. Contrast this with a Gallup poll which found that only 38% of American citizens were satisfied with the U.S. federal government. While several explanations exist to explain this difference, it should not be ignored that the PRC’s policies over the last three decades have lifted over 700 million people from poverty and made China the largest economy in the world (in purchasing power parity or PPP terms, a benchmark the CIA uses to measure economies). Over the same thirty-year period, the American middle class’s economic prospects have barely moved. Moreover, it should be pointed out that China does not appear to want to assume the global responsibilities that the United States did after World War II.

Summarizing this situation, the U.S. National Security Strategy posits that “Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world’s leading power.” In the military domain, this means accelerating high-tech modernization and specialized capabilities to be more effective at defending and asserting its territorial claims, especially for the PRC’s effort to unify Taiwan. Xi Jinping has ordered the military to achieve these advanced goals by 2027, and the PLA is increasingly demonstrating these emergent capabilities to pressure Taiwan. Accordingly, the U.S. National Defense Strategy is focused on the PRC as the “pacing challenge” for its concept of “integrated deterrence.” But time is short, both strategies describe a “decisive decade” to meet this challenge. In his history of American strategy toward Asia, Michael J. Green observes that the region has often been the “theater of future aspirations” for America given its Atlanticist gaze. Will competing crises east of Washington now keep the Indo-Pacific on the backburner despite the urgency and priority on China and the region found in U.S. strategy? What new risks are apparent in these current national strategies? Can the United States still achieve its stated priorities given that just the interest on the U.S. government debt now exceeds its defense budget? What innovations or strategic fine-tuning to grand strategy is now necessary, especially to cope with the U.S. funding of the Ukraine War ($46 billion and counting) and with the recent $105 billion request by the Biden Administration for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan support.

These core tensions, together with uncertain prospects for consistent leadership in Congress and a coming impassioned Presidential election, set the stage for the following
SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: China and the Indo-Asia-Pacific

proposed topics and discussion questions, each of which can be seen both as a component of this grand strategic problem or as strategic problems in their own right.

**Readings to Frame Our Understanding**


[https://tinyurl.com/mj5xx2sx](https://tinyurl.com/mj5xx2sx)

[http://ereader.wsj.net?selDate=20231017&goTo=A001&artid=0](http://ereader.wsj.net?selDate=20231017&goTo=A001&artid=0)

Dartmouth Summer Lecture Series. “The Way Forward” (China and U.S.), Live presentation by Ryan Hass, Director China Center, Brookings Institution, moderated by Sarwar Kashmeri. (Please fast forward to 10-minute mark)

**Proposed Topics and Questions for Discussion:**

**Preserving Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait Amid Competing Wars Across the Atlantic**

The undetermined sovereign status of Taiwan and the divided Korean peninsula are the two most consequential chapters of Cold War history not yet closed. For Taiwan, since 1979 the United States has kept a one China policy explicitly distinct from Beijing’s position, citing the Taiwan Relations Act, three Joint Communiques, and Six Assurances rather than recognizing the PRC’s “one China principle.” But in the years since these bedrock documents took effect Taiwan democratized and transformed into a technology powerhouse. Meanwhile, the PRC’s military (hard power) grew exponentially in the last 30 years. Of the numerous realistic war simulations conducted by the Pentagon for a China-Taiwan conflict involving the U.S., China has emerged victorious every time. Given that war between China and the United States is not inevitable and that both countries are potent nuclear powers, what should be the future U.S. policy for China and Taiwan? How can the United States help protect Taiwan’s political and economic flourishing while also stabilizing relations with the PRC?

-Will wars in Ukraine and Gaza refocus the United States away from the “pacing challenge?”
-Does the present U.S. One-China Policy still promote deterrence, or is it outdated?
-How can the United States maintain deterrence in the Indo-Pacific?
-In what ways could the U.S. change the way it thinks about arming Taiwan to further deter a Chinese invasion? Does U.S. military assistance in the Russia-Ukraine War inform this strategy?
-Is time on Beijing’s side or Taipei’s side (or Washington’s side)? Does time matter? Why or why not?


[https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-military-rivalry-china-vs-us](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-military-rivalry-china-vs-us)


America is second. Poverty can be reduced at record pace under an authoritarian government using market-based economic reform without relinquishing political control of a state-owned market. In nominal terms (based on purchasing power parity or PPP), China has already surpassed the U.S. economy. The rate and extent to which China has reduced poverty within its borders since the 1980s is without precedent. The United States is no longer the undisputed world leader. Political leaders, policymakers, and the mainstream news media seem to believe that a rising China is a zero-sum detriment to the United States. Sarwar Kashmeri believes that business leaders from China and the U.S. can enter the current moment and develop new solutions that will benefit both countries economically and geopolitically. He suggests that the U.S. should eliminate trade tariffs on Chinese goods and forge a shared plan with China to restructure global debt.

Despite efforts from both sides to “de-risk” or “self-strengthen,” the U.S. and Chinese economies remain interdependent even as they compete. In competition, opportunities for both states to exert “sticky power” are also rising. Sticky power is a type of economic power that attracts external investment and trade into a state’s economic institutions. Once the economic intertwining occurs, it becomes difficult for the attracted state to release itself from where it is stuck. Any innovative co-state business-led solution should attempt to consider its downstream effects.

-What national security concerns arise from business-led cooperation between the U.S. and China?

-How might forming a “G2” or co-state solution with China impact U.S. partnerships in the Indo-Pacific? Is this option viable if the U.S. strategic priority is toward Europe and Israel?

-How might the U.S. and China cooperate to address the world’s most pressing issues like the recent global health crisis? Can this framework be applied to cooperatively solving other complex issues? (see Kennedy & Huang Table 3.1 for priority and feasibility framework).


Maintaining Partnerships While Pacific States Hedge

Pacific states are becoming increasingly more likely to hedge in their strategic partnerships in the modern era. It is common for smaller island states to rely on the United States for military security in the Pacific, but the same nations will enter into economic or political agreements with China. Weaker states are incentivized to not pick sides in the great power competition between the United States and China since they receive dual benefits while maintaining traditional nonalignment stances. Perhaps domestic political and economic instability within the U.S. (especially following the global financial crises of 2008) also makes partnership building in China’s backyard more challenging. Wu finds empirical support that weaker states are less likely to hedge when they perceive strength from a more dominant power.

- How have U.S. domestic policies driven wedges between the U.S. and its major allies in the Pacific region? Are these policies pushing our allies or partners closer to China as a result?
- How should the U.S. develop policy relating to emerging or critical technologies (electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, semiconductor manufacturing) to promote U.S. interests in the region?
- How will America’s approach to Ukraine and Israel affect the perceptions and actions of U.S. Indo-Pacific allies and partners?
