

# VIEWS



## China and the World Roundtable | China-US Relations

**Editor's note:** According to US media reports, Donald Trump was reelected as the US' 47th president on Wednesday. How will Sino-US ties develop in the coming years? Three experts share their views.

Li Yan

# US, China should jointly face global issues

China-US relations are the most important bilateral relations of the 21st century, because they impact the well-being of the people of the two countries and will help shape the world's future. And the future of China-US relations could be influenced by the new US president.

While the world faces a plethora of challenges, including geopolitical conflicts, faltering economic recovery, AI governance, global governance reform and climate change, the frictions between major powers have intensified. To overcome these challenges, the world needs global stability and cooperation, especially cooperation between China and the United States.

China and the US worked together on the principle of mutual benefit and mutual respect for four decades since establishing diplomatic ties on Jan 1, 1979. In 2001, China and the US agreed to work together to counter global terrorism. In 2008, the two sides joined hands to deal with the global financial crisis and develop a new pattern of global economic governance. In 2015, they jointly helped finalize the Paris Agreement at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, thereby strengthening the global fight against climate change.

But the tariff war between China and the US since 2018, and the three-year COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, dealt blows to bilateral relations, as well as the global economy. But before the world could recover from the impacts of the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out in February 2022, followed by the Israel-Palestine conflict in October last year. Not to mention that global growth remains weak and climate governance stagnant.

No country can be immune to the consequences of global issues, and no country can overcome all the challenges alone. Global cooperation, especially cooperation between China and the US, is needed to address all these challenges.

The campaign for the just-concluded presidential election showed that the American people are still most con-



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cerned about domestic issues such as the economy, healthcare, immigration, crime and drug trafficking. But the US needs China's cooperation to address the fentanyl drug problem. Fentanyl, a powerful opioid narcotic analgesic, was developed to be used in its citrate form to treat chronic pain, before, during and after surgery.

But due to its high addictiveness,

some people in the US have been using it as a drug. Drug abuse has become a major cause of accidental deaths in the US, with the abuse of opioids such as fentanyl being especially dangerous.

China is a pioneer in global drug control and the first country to formally list fentanyl and all fentanyl-like substances as narcotics. As such, the US can address the fentanyl problem in the country only by working with China to strengthen regulation on opioids.

Since the beginning of this year, China and the US have gradually resumed high-level exchanges and communication at all levels. The two sides have continued to cooperate in areas such as drug control, law enforcement and repatriation of illegal immigrants and fugitives, climate change and AI. So

the new US administration needs to deepen cooperation with China to address some of its domestic problems.

In recent years, the US strategic community has started debating the country's "China policy" and China-US relations during the presidential campaign. And a debate on an issue means the issue is controversial, ambiguous and potentially dangerous.

Though in past years being tough on China and checking China's rise seem to have become the favorite pursuit of the US administration, the Congress and strategic circles, there are some rational voices in the US. For example, Rush Doshi, former director of China Affairs, affiliated with the National Security Council, said that a direct conflict with China is not advisable, and the US should reduce the risk of tensions escalating into a war through "managed competition".

And Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said that being obsessed with the thought of confronting China has undermined the US' global leadership. And political scientists such as Jessica Chen Weiss and James Steinberg have said China and the US should not be locked in a zero-sum game, because cooperation between them is key to addressing bilateral and global issues.

It is clear therefore that the US' China policy is not set in stone, and its adjustment from time to time reflects the US strategic community's recognition of the importance of China-US relations.

China's policy toward the US has always been clear, as China has always preferred dialogue and cooperation over zero-sum games. The success and achievements of China and the US are beneficial, rather than a challenge, for both sides. So the new US president should attach greater importance to China-US relations and engage in win-win cooperation.

*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

# What Trump augurs for Sino-US ties

The rhetorical heat remains. The partisan smoke has not yet cleared. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly sure that Donald Trump, the 45th US president, will return to the White House as the 47th US president with a surprisingly decisive victory. US presidential elections have consequences and while Sino-US relations will be one among many, it will be a big one.

It is no exaggeration that nothing matters more for global peace and prosperity, over and above the obvious well-being of the American and Chinese peoples, than good, stable relations between the two largest economies of the world. Everyone wins when Sino-US relations are good; everyone loses when Sino-US relations are not stable.

Consider the background in US politics. It is probable, even revelatory, that while Democrats and Republicans fight over almost every imaginable issue, promulgating radically opposing worldviews, they are remarkably unified in taking a tough stand on China.

In fact, the two major political parties try to outdo each other in being (or just appearing) "tougher" on China. "Soft on China", on the other hand, can be a career-wrecking epithet. Why American attitude toward China has been toughening over the past 10 years or so is beyond the scope of this article, but to assume it is all some deep-seated conspiracy to isolate, weaken and contain China would be to miss essential features of Sino-US relations that could help reverse the deterioration.

Yet the US' China policy was not much featured in the harsh, disputatious election campaign — other than some unsurprising rote rhetoric. This relative unimportance is a good thing. Sure, both Trump and Democrat candidate Kamala Harris criticized the other's China policy, but far more substantial in their non-stop, calumnious debates were, domestically, illegal immigration, the economy, abortion, wokeness, taxation, the list goes on, and internationally, the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts. That China played the undercard in the campaign rhetoric is a good thing as it affords the winner greater flexibility in optimizing the China policy in the real world.

Over the years, Trump's approach to China has been both consistent and, well, simplistic. On the one hand, he has long blamed weak US policy toward China as responsible for the decline of American manufacturing, an oft-repeated charge that few economists support. On the other hand, Trump professes appreciation and a kind of admiration for the Chinese leader.

Trump is rightfully called "transactional" in that he seeks to make what he believes to be favorable deals for the United States and his perceptions of how such deals would enhance his own image. "Transactional" meaning ideology-free; some would say "values-free".

Trump would not likely care much about "human rights" or "minority rights" in China. He would not focus on China's domestic issues, only those that, in his worldview, affect the US. He would care about drug interdiction, balance of trade, economic competition, and the like.

Trump relishes trade war. He has described himself as "Mr. Tariffs." He sees tariffs as the go-to, first policy prescription for various global ills, whether those of adversaries or allies. He is correct that tariffs would hurt other countries but incorrect that tariffs would overall help the US.

Trump will almost certainly raise tariffs, across the board and with special intensity on Chinese goods. The consequences of such tariffs would almost certainly lead to lower economic efficiencies globally and higher prices for American consumers. However, Trump being Trump, he would seek to make some kind of grand deal with China.

It is usually the case that one can forecast a US president's foreign policy by assessing the background and policy positions of those he picks for the top foreign policy positions, such as secretary of state, national security adviser, and other senior roles. This truism is less true for Trump, who has a history of flouting expert advice, dismissing senior personnel as if actors auditioning for bit parts, and going with his gut instincts.

Moreover, Trump seems to have learned questionable lessons from his first presidential term, when many of his former senior staff turned against him, leveling withering criticisms, and so now he prizes personal loyalty above professional competence, a worrying hierarchy of priorities for a US president. I suspect that those deemed most loyal to Trump are those most likely to hold rigid positions opposing China. Yet Trump is bold and fearless and likes to surprise.

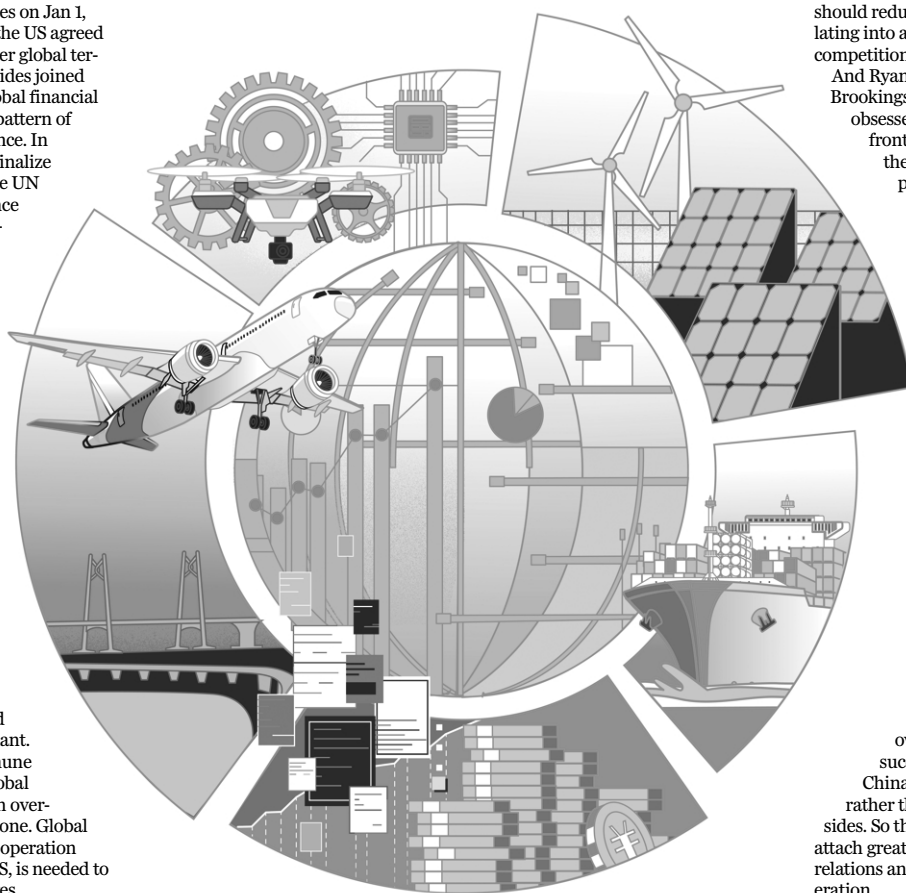
What to do? My three-fold prescription for Sino-US relations is simple — I offer both sides the same advice: Don't make things worse, such as by pushing against mutual "redlines"; do find small areas of cooperation, such as fighting illegal drugs, organized crime, epidemics, AI risk, and climate change; and allow time to pass peacefully and to work its calming magic.

The Chinese and American peoples will support it. And the peace and prosperity of the world depend on it.

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SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

David Gosset

# New start or old patterns for the two largest economies?

According to US media, the American people have elected Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States, a momentous event that is significant for not only Americans but also the entire world. The role of the US in global affairs makes every presidential election a matter of great international interest.

As the leader of the world's largest economy with unparalleled military and diplomatic reach, the new US administration's policies and direction will reverberate far beyond the country's borders. One area where the impact of this election will be felt most acutely is the US-China relationship, which stands as the most consequential bilateral relationship of our time.

It is a fact that the Sino-US relationship has evolved into a complex rivalry that encompasses economic, technological, military and ideological dimensions. This is not a rivalry likely to fade any time soon, and it risks becoming a source of greater global division. At its core, this rivalry is rooted in differing visions of global leadership and national identity, with both countries vying for influence on the world stage.

Hence, true change in this dynamic would require a major paradigm shift: a reassessment of the US' understanding of China's strategic intentions.

Much of the tension between the two major powers stems from a perception in Washington that China's rise poses a direct threat to the US' prosperity and the American way of life. This belief fuels a tendency toward defensive and

adversarial policies, which only serve to heighten tensions.

Yet Trump should recognize that the inevitable renaissance of China does not have to be viewed through a lens of threat or antagonism. While China's economic and political influence continues to grow, it does not necessarily follow that this growth will come at the expense of the US or its global standing. In fact, it is not only possible but highly necessary for China's power to harmonize with the US' power for the sake of global stability and peace.

To navigate this evolving landscape, the new US administration must reconsider its approach to China. Viewing China's rise as an opportunity for cooperation rather than as a zero-sum game is crucial. However, a reassessment of China's strategic intentions should begin with an acknowledgment of the peaceful nature of China's rise.

Over the past few decades, China has demonstrated a largely non-interventionist approach to foreign policy, focusing on internal development and economic growth rather than expan-



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sionist or imperialist ambitions. The Belt and Road Initiative is emblematic of China's strategy to enhance its global influence through economic ties and infrastructure development rather than military might.

However, the rise of China does come with complexities. Power is relative, and as China's global influence increases, the US' unilateral dominance in world affairs inevitably erodes. This shift in the global power balance has understandably led to anxiety in the US about its future role in the world.

Nonetheless, this moment in history presents an opportunity for the US to redefine what leadership means in a truly multipolar world. The US can still demonstrate leadership by fostering a global order that prioritizes cooperation, diplomacy, and mutual respect, rather than one rooted in rivalry, conflict and a zero-sum game mindset.

China's peaceful rise, coupled with its massive domestic market and growing technological prowess, can be seen as complementary to global growth rather than as a destabilizing force. The challenge for the US will be to change its mindset from one of containment and confrontation to one of engagement and partnership. By doing so, the US can help shape a future where both nations contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

A critical step toward realizing this goal is through dialogue and diplomacy. Working with China to address common global challenges such as climate change and public health, and to maintain economic stability is essential. Both countries have an interest in

addressing these issues, and cooperation in these areas could serve as a foundation for building trust and reducing tensions.

Moreover, addressing the areas where US-China competition is most intense — such as technology and trade — requires a nuanced approach that balances national interests with the broader need for global stability.

The risk of escalating rivalry between the US and China is real but not inevitable. While competition between the two major powers will likely persist, it does not have to devolve into outright conflict. The new US administration has the opportunity to take a bold step in reassessing its understanding of China's strategic intentions and in crafting a more forward-thinking and cooperative approach to managing the Sino-US relationship. In doing so, the administration can maximize the chances of a peaceful and prosperous future for all mankind.

At this pivotal moment in history, the world is watching. How the US chooses to engage with China will have profound implications not only for the future of the two countries but also for the future of the global order. Now more than ever, the US must rise to the challenge of leadership by embracing diplomacy, fostering cooperation, and striving for a future where the rise of China does not signal the decline of the US but rather an opportunity for shared progress.

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