

NFHS Topic Proposal
United States and China: A Strategic Competition

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Rationale for the Topic	4
Overview	4
Division of Ground	16
Affirmative	16
Negative	17
Works Cited	20
Potential Resolution Wordings	22
Key Definitions	23

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Rationale for the Topic

The current United States relationship with China is properly characterized as a “strategic competition.” The United States Senate Committee on Armed Services held a hearing on June 8, 2021 entitled, “The United States’ Strategic Competition with China.” Evan Medeiros, the Penner Family Chair in Asian Studies and Cling Family Distinguished Fellow School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, made the following opening statement at this Senate hearing:

It has become trite but accurate to point out that the U.S.-China relationship is the most consequential relationship in global politics today. But this claim is accurate not only because U.S.- China ties have become contentious and competitive, but because the competition is multi-faceted, dynamic and may ultimately be a greater challenge than the Soviet Union. In particular, U.S.-China relations will have a defining influence on the distribution of power across East Asia at the very time that the region becomes the center of global politics, as Europe was during the Cold War. Thus, the Biden administration’s approach to competition with China is now a paramount question for leaders in the United States, in Asia, and globally. The challenge for U.S. policymakers, business leaders and scholars is to understand the nature of the competition – now and in the future – and to ensure U.S. responses are both robust and flexible enough to keep up with the challenge. (Medeiros, 2021)

This “strategic competition” theme was also highlighted in the 2021 RAND Corporation book entitled, *Understanding Influence in the Strategic Competition With China*. Lead author, Michael J. Mazarr, associate dean for academics at the U.S. National War College in Washington, D.C., is also a former runner-up national debate champion at Georgetown University. Mazarr and his research associates open this 168-page book with the following comment:

Over the past two decades, China’s role in the geopolitical landscape has grown, particularly as a result of the country’s rising economic and military power. Thus, U.S. leaders now view China as a strategic competitor – one that seeks to upend the post–World War II liberal international order. An integral part of this competition is the contest for influence in the international system. As part of a larger study on the United States’ strategic competition with China and Russia, this report examines the contest with China for influence in countries throughout the world. (Mazarr et al., 2021, p. iii)

Understanding the proper management of the strategic competition between the United States and China offers a rewarding area for debate in 2022-23. Recent policy topics focused on China have included the 2016-17 topic, “Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with the People’s Republic of China,” and 1995-96, “Resolved: That the United States government should substantially change its foreign policy toward the People’s Republic of China.” Both topics were highly successful international topics, providing an in-depth look at U.S.-China relations. In 2022-23 it will have been six years since a China topic has been debated, and there is little doubt that China will be at the center of U.S. foreign policy discussions.

Overview

The United States is working behind the curve to combat and overcome China’s overarching influence on the global stage. The United States risks falling behind in trade and technology, national security and military power, science and space, global health and even in combating human rights abuses. However, the literature is very clear. The United States will not be able to successfully compete with China in isolation; the United States must partner with other nations. The evidence submitted below is not intended to be all encompassing, but rather to provide some insight to the challenges facing the United States in the areas mentioned above.

The United States must create policies with internal and external partners that develop a strategic competition to China. David Dollar and Ryan Hass, both senior fellows at the Brookings Institution, highlight the importance of partnerships in their January 25, 2021 article entitled, “Getting the China Challenge Right:”

The Trump administration had an incoherent and inconsistent policy toward China that failed to deliver on its promises. An alternative response to the China challenge would require taking four critical steps. First, the United States must strengthen its own economy through reforms and investments that are beyond the scope of this paper but are detailed elsewhere in Brookings’s Blueprints for American Renewal & Prosperity. Second, the U.S. should work with allies in Asia and Europe to push China to continue opening its economy and developing 21st century rules for new aspects of trade. Chinese trade is more important to our allies than it is to the American economy. So while it will be tempting to try to decouple from China, decoupling is a losing strategy down the road since America’s partners would not follow suit, and the U.S. would end up isolated. Third, the U.S. needs to counter China’s assertiveness with its neighbors through a strong military presence and call out China for its undermining and violations of international rules and norms. Fourth, the U.S. needs to work with China on issues where there is common interest, especially on climate change, global public health, support to poor countries, and nuclear nonproliferation. What makes the relationship especially complicated is the need to work closely with China on some issues while countering it in other domains. For the United States, China is a partner, competitor, and challenger all at the same time.

America’s relationship with China will be the most complex and important aspect of foreign policy for the next generation. China is the largest trading nation, the second largest economy, and with a population four times larger than that of the sector and extensive government intervention in the form of protections and subsidies. Together with economic prowess, China has developed a military that, though still not as advanced as the U.S. military, is clearly second in the world, and increasingly capable of concentrating forces in ways that would strain America’s ability to respond directly to contingencies along its periphery. With that rising military might has come growing Chinese assertiveness in disputes with neighbors (Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and India).

While China’s economic reforms and opening have achieved impressive results, the country’s political openness has not advanced in tandem, and, in fact, has reversed trajectory under President Xi Jinping. Aside from clamping down on domestic opposition in general, China has curtailed freedoms in Hong Kong and pursued a campaign of brutal suppression in Xinjiang that has forced an estimated one million (and possibly more) Uyghurs into involuntary detention.

Finally, given the size of the country’s population and GDP, China is necessarily at the heart of multilateral efforts surrounding global public goods like climate change, pandemic response, and economic development. It is overwhelmingly the largest emitter of carbon, and is financing coal-fired power plants throughout the developing world. The virus that causes COVID-19 emerged from China, as did SARS years earlier, and a more effective global regime for addressing future pandemics would require close collaboration with China. The country is also the largest official creditor to the developing world. In the wake of the COVID-19 recession, many poor countries face the challenge of financing public services and servicing debt. Multilateral efforts to support poor countries will require a significant contribution from China.

This, then, is the China challenge. China is not purely a partner, competitor, or challenger: it is all of them at once. Effective management of this complex relationship will require policymakers to move beyond the simplistic thinking of China solely as a rival or enemy. They will need to abandon notions of collapsing China's governance structure or impeding its rise with unilateral American pressure. Instead, policymakers will need to craft approaches tailored. (Dollar & Hass, 2021)

Robert Hormats, former U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, describes the importance of building a competitive strategy in collective trade with Pacific trading partners:

Given U.S. domestic politics of the moment, it may be too early for the Biden administration to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (the new version of the TPP). However, collaborating in key areas with the countries that have joined would be a strong signal that the U.S. is back as a major economic and trade player in the Pacific. The new administration should identify several major features of the trade agreement that are consistent with our own objectives and work with its membership collectively to approach China on them. This would considerably strengthen our hand and that of other members of this group. The goal is to give other countries rules and trade options that are alternatives to those of China, recognizing that China will continue to be a major trading partner for most. (Hormats, 2020)

China has become an economic juggernaut in world trade, while the United States risks losing its place at the center of the international marketplace. Geoffrey Garrett, dean of the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business, offers the following assessment in a May 6, 2021 report:

Roughly two-thirds of the 190 countries in the world now trade more with China than they do with the U.S., with about 90 countries doing more than twice as much trade with China as with America, according to the Lowy Institute in Australia. Despite all the noise about America's economic dependence on China, the U.S. actually relies much less on trade overall, and trade with China in particular, than most of the rest of the world – including the countries Biden hopes will be linchpins in his anti-China coalition. Today, global trade amounts to about 60 percent of the world's GDP. But trade is only one-quarter of GDP for the U.S. The U.S. is also less reliant on China trade than most countries – with roughly as much American trade with each of Canada, the European Union and Mexico as with China. This means that the potential economic costs of confronting China are simply lower for the U.S. than they are for many other countries. That is one reason Biden seems in no hurry to end Trump's trade war and why China policy is a rare instance of bipartisanship in Washington, D.C.

The calculus is very different in most other global capitals. Consider the economic positioning of four countries the U.S. hopes will be at the heart of its get-tough-on-China team: America's "Quad" security partners in the Indo-Pacific (Australia, India and Japan); and Germany, the pivotal player in the European Union. All of these countries are stable democracies. All share the U.S.'s concerns about China's human rights record, military ambitions, territorial aspirations and economic mercantilism. But trade is considerably more important to all of them than it is to the U.S. – and all have China as their largest trading partner. The potential economic downside in confronting China is considerably higher for all of them than it is for America. This complicates the strategic calculations of these countries when it comes to balancing their longstanding political and military ties to the U.S. with the newer realities of their deep economic relationships with China. These four countries will always publicly resist the notion that they must "choose"

between America and China. But behind closed doors, that is what they must increasingly do. Their choices will likely vary, however, based both on the relative importance of their economic dependence on China compared with their national security reliance on the U.S. (Garrett, 2021)

A key part of China's strategy for domination of world trade is the strategic exportation of technology that ensures the dependent status of its trading partners. Joshua Fitt, a research associate with the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, describes this strategy as "digital authoritarianism" in a February 25, 2021 article in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*:

Many of China's technology companies perfect their products in the domestic market by facilitating the party-state's oppression and data control, and subsequently seek to export the technology to fledgling authoritarian states or nations with fragile democracies. This is part of Beijing's strategy to enhance its digital instruments of national power, normalize illiberal uses of technology, and equip foreign governments with the tools to replicate aspects of the CCP's authoritarian governance model. If Washington wants to blunt this strategy, the US government needs to implement a comprehensive strategy of its own to address this. As the Chinese economy grew exponentially over the past couple decades, so did its capacity to support technological innovation. China's tech giants have flourished, responding to the demand of a rapidly digitizing population by developing much-needed technology and digital services.

A growing proportion of this new technology is classified as dual-use technology, which gathers data that can be processed to facilitate authoritarian practices even when its original intended use case was benign. Dual-use technology is not unique to China, but China is the only country producing such technology at scale within an authoritarian system. Furthermore, Beijing's national security and cybersecurity laws preclude companies from having any official recourse when instructed to comply with the government on nebulous national security matters. Still, companies willingly seek opportunities to work with the government in order to test and refine their technology, even when the projects limit civil liberties. For example, surveillance and AI developers such as Hikvision and iFlytek have partnered with authorities in Xinjiang to facilitate the oppression of the region's Uyghur minority. In the short term, the party-state benefits from an increased level of control and the partner companies acquire lucrative contracts. Over the long term, both parties benefit from marketing the technology abroad as "tried and true" tools that make authoritarian rule easier. The three fundamental vectors in Beijing's strategic toolkit for making the world more hospitable to illiberal practices are digital infrastructure, norms, and data acquisition. Huawei's 5G rollout has dominated conversations in Washington about China's export of surveillance tools, but it is just one instance in Beijing's broader campaign to expand its global technological footprint. In addition, China often supplies the tools it uses to control its own population to governments that are seeking to emulate elements of the Chinese Communist Party's governance model. After several major Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects failed to deliver results or incensed the populations of their host countries, intense scrutiny and criticism from the international community pushed Beijing to shift its focus to the BRI's digital component, the Digital Silk Road (DSR). While DSR projects similarly aim to fill infrastructure gaps in the host country, digital infrastructure projects are typically less expensive and logistically complicated than traditional hard infrastructure projects, which is especially important given the projected long-term global economic contraction triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The projects' digital focus also provides a greater strategic value to Beijing. The renewed emphasis on the DSR is supported by Beijing's

sustained campaign in multilateral bodies to gain influence through leadership positions and savvy financial contributions in order to legitimize its projects, facilitate the adoption of Chinese technical standards, and normalize illiberal behavior across the globe.

China has secured over two dozen BRI memoranda with UN agencies and commissions, including with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which Secretary-General Houlin Zhou signed an agreement “to cooperate with China to assist countries to strengthen their information and communications technology networks and services” at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum. Beijing also spearheaded initiatives to legitimize broad-brush Internet censorship and crimp access to websites hosted in other countries under the guise of “internet sovereignty” in the ITU and UNGA, finding success through enlisting the support of likely allies Russia and North Korea, as well as swing states in the Group of 77.

One of Beijing’s goals in setting the tone of global conversations about the Internet is to lay the groundwork for taking advantage of global information flows. The videos and messages that users upload to apps like TikTok represent the tip of the data iceberg that the app collects. Chinese tech giants can claim – as TikTok’s parent company ByteDance did in 2019 – that because there is an air gap between international and domestic operations, their data are not subject to Chinese law. However, due to the massive leverage that the PRC has over private companies in China, Chinese national security authorities could easily decide to put that claim to the test. Beijing is launching companies, state-owned ventures, and researchers with hidden ties to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) abroad in order to tap into massive amounts of data, expertise, and intellectual property.

While the individual pieces of information may not be of great strategic importance, at the macro level, these foreign data sets are invaluable for improving Chinese AI research and development projects. The above vectors constitute integral parts of Beijing’s digital strategy to increase its power by spreading technology that facilitates authoritarian governance, expanding China’s role in shaping global digital norms, and further honing its domestic instruments of power. This strategy does not exist in a vacuum – US-China strategic competition lies chiefly in the economic and technological realms because therein lie the most effective levers short of war that China can pull to challenge the supremacy of the United States. Thus far, large elements of China’s digital strategy have gone unanswered. If the United States is not ready to cede its position in the Indo-Pacific and the world, Washington must adopt its own comprehensive digital strategy. For such a strategy to have the greatest impact, it ought to adhere to the following principles. First, the strategy should focus primarily on the Indo-Pacific Region while remaining globally adaptable. Second, it should advance concrete positive alternatives from the United States rather than simply condemning Beijing. Third, it should harness the full potential of all relevant government agencies. And fourth, it should involve US allies and partners to the greatest extent possible. (Fitt, 2021)

China also poses the biggest threat to the United States in the military and national security arena. Julian Barnes, national security reporter for the *New York Times*, describes this threat in an April 13, 2021 article:

China’s effort to expand its growing influence represents one of the largest threats to the United States, according to a major annual intelligence report released on Tuesday, which also warned of the broad national security challenges posed by Moscow and Beijing. The report does not predict a military confrontation with either Russia or China, but it suggests that so-called gray-zone battles for power, which are meant to fall short of

inciting all-out war, will intensify with intelligence operations, cyberattacks and global drives for influence. The report puts China's push for "global power" first on the list of threats, followed by Russia, Iran and North Korea. There are typically few broad revelations in the annual reports, which are a collection of declassified assessments, although the intelligence agencies' ranking of threats and how they change over time can be telling. "Beijing, Moscow, Tehran and Pyongyang have demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States and its allies, despite the pandemic," the report said. "China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas – especially economically, militarily and technologically – and is pushing to change global norms." China's strategy, according to the report, is to drive wedges between the United States and its allies. Beijing has also used its success in combating the coronavirus pandemic to promote the "superiority of its system." The report predicts more tensions in the South China Sea, as Beijing continues to intimidate rivals in the region. It also predicts that China will press the government of Taiwan to move forward with unification and criticize efforts by the United States to bolster engagement with Taipei. But the report stopped short of predicting any kind of direct military conflict. "We expect that friction will grow as Beijing steps up attempts to portray Taipei as internationally isolated and dependent on the mainland for economic prosperity, and as China continues to increase military activity around the island," the report said. (Barnes, 2021)

Security experts now believe that China eclipses terrorist groups as a top U.S. security threat. Vera Bergengruen, Pentagon reporter for BuzzFeed News, offers the following assessment in an April 14, 2021 article:

The National security threats that top intelligence officials laid out for lawmakers on Wednesday were dominated by China's efforts to expand its global influence and the "cascading crises" and "looming disequilibrium" facing the Biden Administration as existing security challenges are exacerbated by the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Their warnings, coupled with a written annual threats assessment released on Tuesday, signaled a diminishing focus on non-state terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State over the past two decades. The report details Washington's shifting priorities, as evidenced by President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, with the U.S. turning from its fight against international terrorism to countering China, Russia and Iran, as well as increased attention on domestic extremism, climate change, cyber threats, and transnational organized crime. In Wednesday's hearing – the first on global threats in two years – Beijing's expansionism topped the list of threats that intelligence officials gave the Senate Intelligence Committee. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines called China an "unparalleled priority" for the intelligence community. FBI Director Christopher Wray noted that his agency opens a new investigation that links back to the Chinese government every 10 hours. "I don't think there is any country that presents a more severe threat to our innovation, our economic security and our democratic ideals," he told lawmakers. (Bergengruen, 2021)

Despite spending trillions of dollars on the military, the United States may not be ready for a war with China. Michael Beckley, fellow in the International Security Program at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs The United States Is Not Ready for a War With China, expresses such a concern in a June 10, 2021 article in *Foreign Affairs*:

The United States has spent \$19 trillion on its military since the end of the Cold War. That is \$16 trillion more than China spent and nearly as much as the rest of the world combined spent during the same period. Yet many experts think that the United States is about to lose a devastating war. In March, Admiral Philip Davidson, then the commander

of U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific, warned that within the next six years, China's military will "overmatch" that of the United States and will "forcibly change the status quo" in East Asia. Back in 2019, a former Pentagon official claimed that the U.S. military routinely "gets its ass handed to it" in war games simulating combat with China. Meanwhile, many analysts and researchers have concluded that if China chose to conquer Taiwan, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) could cripple whatever U.S. forces tried to stand in its way. It has become conventional wisdom that this gathering storm represents the inevitable result of Beijing's rise and Washington's decline. (Beckley, 2021)

Outer space has also become a new battleground in the technological competition for supremacy. Arjun Kharpal, senior technology correspondent for CNBC, is the author of a June 29, 2021 report entitled, "China Once Said It Couldn't Put a Potato in Space. Now It's Eyeing Mars:"

Space is now another battleground between the U.S. and China amid a broader technological rivalry for supremacy, one that could have scientific and military implications on Earth. "President Xi Jinping has declared that China's 'Space Dream' is to overtake all nations and become the leading space power by 2045," said Christopher Newman, professor of space law and policy at the U.K.'s Northumbria University. "This all feeds into China's ambition to be the world's single science and technology superpower." (Kharpal, 2021)

The Atlantic Council published an April 2021 report entitled, *The Future of Security in Space: A Thirty-Year U.S. Strategy*, emphasizing the importance of space as a focus of U.S. China strategic competition:

Space in 2050 will look vastly different from space today. Over the next decade alone, the number of satellites could quintuple as government and industry entities launch various missions. While such proliferation of activity will enhance space-based capabilities, enabling universal Internet access, and enhancing Earth-observation and data-collection capabilities, it also risks further space debris triggering an unstoppable chain of collisions. Space is currently undergoing a paradigm shift, as commercial entities are developing and fielding the technologies that are the key drivers of space utilization.

Indeed, inventive space companies are expanding the concept of what is possible in space, eyeing space tourism in the near future, and simultaneously growing the space economy to what could be a trillion-dollar enterprise by 2040. In the long term, commercial and state entities will see novel levels of cislunar activity, requiring ISRU and onsite, three-dimensional (3D) manufacturing to keep pace with space activity. Indeed, spaceflight could underpin resiliency on Earth, opening access to space-based energy and material resources.

Yet, with the realization of such value in the space domain, the future may see an increased use of space by militaries, including great-power competitors China and Russia. China is racing to develop capacity for its own permanent space station, cislunar supremacy, and deep-space exploration within the next thirty years. Despite the expansive future of space, the current space framework is rooted in the past. The future is just around the corner, and protecting space will cultivate innovation, wealth, and security to the benefit of all humanity. (Starling et al., 2021)

China's rise as a major actor in outer space creates a fundamental dilemma for the United States, according to Frank Rose, senior fellow for security and strategy in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution, writing in an April 2020 article:

Access to outer space is critical to modern everyday life on Earth. The utilization of outer space helps us warn of natural disasters, facilitate navigation and transportation globally, expand our scientific frontiers, monitor compliance with arms control treaties and agreements, provide global access to financial operations, and scores of other activities worldwide. However, today's outer space environment is evolving rapidly, presenting the United States and the entire international community with several key challenges to the sustainability, safety, stability, and security of the outer space environment. Some of these key challenges include the growth of orbital debris, which represents an ever-increasing threat to both human and robotic space flight, the emergence of mega constellations of small satellites, and the development and deployment of anti-satellite (or ASAT) capabilities.

China's increasing activities in outer space lie at the heart of these challenges. Over the past several decades, China has rapidly expanded its presence in outer space in both the civil and military arenas. Given the increasing role that China is playing in the space domain in the future, the United States will need to develop a strategy that deters China's increasing ASAT capabilities, while at the same time finds ways to work with China cooperatively on sustainability and safety issues like orbital debris, space traffic management, and the rise of mega satellite constellations. Elements of such a strategy should include: enhancing deterrence and increasing resiliency against Chinese ASAT threats; reinvigorating the U.S.-China bilateral dialogue on space security issues; continuing the U.S.-China Civil Space Dialogue; developing bilateral and multilateral norms of behavior for outer space; identifying ways to cooperate with China on pragmatic civil space projects; and reviewing current congressional limitations on civil space cooperation with China. . . . The United States faces a fundamental dilemma as it attempts to effectively manage China's rise as a major actor in outer space. On one hand, China's development of anti-satellite weapons represents a direct threat to U.S. and allied space systems. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the United States and the international community will be able to address the key challenges facing the outer space environment – i.e., the growth of orbital debris and the rise of mega constellations – without engaging with China. (Rose, 2020)

Global health is another arena for strategic competition between the U.S. and China. Robert Hormats, former U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, points out the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in creating this competitive environment:

Thousands of Chinese scientists and doctors work in U.S. labs and hospitals and have for decades. There are ways that our scientists and researchers can work with those in China on the Covid-19 pandemic to accelerate the development of therapeutic drugs and more vaccines – and learn from one another about effective public health measures to avoid and address new types of pandemics. The U.S. should, of course, insist on strict intellectual property protection and protection of trade secrets; within that context, Chinese and American researchers, scientists, and drug companies – with a long tradition of cooperation – can learn from one another on vaccines and therapeutics.? (Hormats, 2020)

A robust U.S. response to China's health diplomacy will reap global benefits, according to Jennifer Hillman and Alex Tippet, senior fellow and research associate, respectively, at the Council on Foreign Relations:

For nearly a decade the Chinese government has pursued a strategy of global infrastructure development, known as the Belt and Road Initiative, to build its influence.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, China resurrected semi-dormant plans for a Health Silk Road that would extend Beijing's vision of global health governance. Since then, China has consistently invoked the Health Silk Road as it subsidizes or donates medical supplies to COVID-19 stricken countries as a form of "mask diplomacy." More recently, China has begun a program of "vaccine diplomacy," strategically donating vaccine supplies to at least forty-nine countries – all but one of which are participants in the Belt and Road Initiative – and inking commercial agreements with twenty-eight others. By March 2021, one-third of nations classified by the World Bank as "low-income" were using at least one Chinese vaccine. As the Council on Foreign Relations' Yanzhong Huang has argued, through the production and distribution of its vaccines, Beijing can be expected to achieve an increase in its soft power in the form of "prestige, goodwill, perhaps a degree of indebtedness, even awe." China's vaccine diplomacy is already starting to pay political dividends. When president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, requested access to Chinese vaccines, he reiterated that the Philippines would not confront Beijing over its claims in the South China Sea.

Following the delivery of Chinese vaccines, at least twenty-five countries, including U.S. partners like Ethiopia and Pakistan, have expressed support for China's "core interests," a common euphemism for the Chinese government's policies towards Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Xinjiang province. China has also sold or donated vaccines to countries to regions and countries where China has sought to expand its influence, such as Eastern Europe and Egypt. Policymakers in Paraguay, a longtime ally of Taiwan, are even toying with the possibility of reworking their East Asia policy to secure Chinese vaccines. The Health Silk Road has also helped Chinese businesses cement ties in critical markets. Sinovac, one of China's vaccine manufacturers, has signed contracts with Mexico, Indonesia, Ecuador, and Chile. By proffering vaccines to Brazil, China may have helped open up the country's 5G marketplace for the Chinese firm Huawei after it had been previously locked out. China has also used the Health Silk Road to market its AI-powered diagnostic technology and 5G-based remote health care networks. Going forward, China will surely continue to use the relationships created by its Health Silk Road to deepen commercial ties and advance its strategic interests. . . . Before COVID-19, the United States was the undisputed leader on global health issues, the country that others around the world looked to for advice, cutting-edge research, access to medicines and medical devices, technical assistance and financial support, both from its government and from leading non-profits such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. But due to cutbacks in funding, a short-lived withdrawal from the World Health Organization, and a "me-first" approach to the pandemic – particularly in regards to the manufacture and distribution of vaccines – China's Health Silk Road initiative has begun to chip away at U.S. preeminence. As our new CFR-sponsored Independent Task Force report on China's Belt and Road Initiative argues, successfully countering Chinese efforts will require the United States to take a more active role in global relief efforts, put aside "vaccine nationalism," and make domestic investments to ensure it retains its position as the leading developer and provider of pharmaceuticals and medical devices. (Hillman & Tippett, 2021)

Matthew Kroenig and Jeffrey Cimmino, analysts at the Atlantic Council, call for a concerted U.S. strategy to build alliances to counter growing Chinese influence:

Following World War II, the United States and its allies and partners established a rules-based international system. While never perfect, it contributed to decades without great-power war, extraordinary economic growth, and a reduction of world poverty. But this system today faces trials ranging from a global pandemic and climate change to

economic disruptions and a revival of great-power competition. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, world order depends on the balance of power and principles of legitimacy. The rise of Chinese power is straining both aspects of the existing rules-based system. China benefited from the system and does not seek to kick over the table as Hitler did with the 1930s international order, but China wants to use its power to change the rules and tilt the table to enhance its winnings. Beijing is directing its growing economic, diplomatic, and military heft toward revisionist geopolitical aims. While we once hoped that China would become what we considered a “responsible stakeholder” in a rules-based system, President Xi Jinping has led his country in a more confrontational direction. Some analysts portray a new Cold War, but this historical metaphor misunderstands the nature of the new challenge. The Soviet Union was a direct military and ideological threat, and there was almost no economic or social interdependence in our relationship.

With China today, we have half a trillion dollars in trade and millions of social interchanges. Moreover, with its “market-Leninist” system, China has learned to harness the creativity of markets to authoritarian Communist party control. It announced its intent to use this system to dominate ten key technologies by 2025. We and our allies are not threatened by the export of communism – few people are taking to the streets in favor of Xi Jinping thought – but by a hybrid system of interdependence. China has become the leading trading partner of more countries than the US. Partial decoupling on security issues like Huawei (discussed below) is necessary, but total decoupling from our overall economic interdependence would be extremely costly, and even impossible in the case of ecological interdependence such as climate change or future pandemics. For better and worse, we are locked in a “cooperative rivalry” in which we have to do two contradictory things at the same time. Addressing the China challenge will require a collective effort on the part of the United States and its allies and partners, in which we leverage effectively our hard and soft power resources to defend ourselves and strengthen a rules-based system. Some pessimists look at China’s population size and economic growth rates and believe that the task is impossible. But on the contrary, if we think in terms our alliances, the combined wealth of the Western democracies – US, Europe, Japan – will far exceed that of China well into the century. A clear strategy with well-defined goals that neither under- nor over-estimates China is necessary for the current moment. Over the past two years, the Atlantic Council has convened high-level meetings of strategists and experts to produce just that. (Kroenig & Cimmino, 2021)

Concern about human rights has been a long-standing issue in U.S.-China relations. Traditionally, the United States has highlighted the human rights abuses in China, but more recently China has attempted to turn the tables. According to Zhang Hui and Yang Sheng, reporters for the *Global Times*, China intends to issue a scathing report on recent human rights abuses in the United States:

China will issue a report on US human rights violations as Washington's failed anti-epidemic efforts in the past year worsened social division, aggravated political chaos and racial discrimination. China's State Council Information Office will in the near future issue a full report on human rights violations in the US in 2020, an official statement said on Monday. The report came after the US and some other Western countries, as well as media, launched a "big lie" diplomatic offensive against China on Xinjiang and COVID-19 topics. The 15,000-Chinese-character document details facts regarding Washington's incompetent pandemic containment leading to tragic outcomes, American democracy's disorder triggering political chaos, ethnic minorities suffering racial discrimination, continuous social unrest threatening public security, growing polarization between the rich and the poor, aggravating social inequality, and the US trampling on

international rules resulting in humanitarian disasters, the Xinhua News Agency reported. Compared with the 2019 report on US human rights issued in 2020, which elaborated on issues including the infringement of citizens' civil rights, the prevalence of money politics, rising income inequality, worsening racial discrimination and growing threats against children, women and immigrants in the US, the 2020 report revealed that many of these issues were severely aggravated by the US' "reckless" COVID-19 response. The US' deteriorating human rights record has also been criticized by international experts. Independent UN human rights experts appealed on Friday for the new US government to adopt wide-ranging reforms to end police violence and address systemic racism and racial discrimination. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at Monday's media briefing that "we hope the US will abandon double standards, and face up to serious human rights issues such as racism and violent law enforcement, and take concrete measures to protect human rights." Zhu Ying, deputy director of the National Human Rights Education and Training Base of Southwest University of Political Science and Law, told the Global Times on Monday that the 2020 report – which objectively depicted the true human rights situation in the US – revealed a turning point of the US' democratic system, based on the key points of the report released on Monday. "Triggered by the pandemic, 2020 was a turning point for the US' democratic system from victory to decline, and Joe Biden will not reverse the declining trend of its democratic system," Zhu said. The main highlight of 2020 report is that it revealed the inevitable declining trend of US human rights, Zhu said. (Hui & Sheng, 2021)

Despite the Chinese effort to highlight rights abuses in the United States, human rights groups continue to focus attention on the Chinese treatment of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Province of Northwest China. A May 17, 2021 article by journalist Tommy Beer in *Forbes* describes the international activism on this issue:

A coalition of several human rights groups issued a joint statement Monday calling for a complete boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, accusing the Chinese government of committing genocide against Uyghurs, as well as "waging an unprecedented campaign of repression" against citizens in several parts of the country, including an "all-out assault on democracy" in Hong Kong. Participating in the 2022 Games would be "tantamount to endorsing China's genocide" and "legitimizing the increasingly repressive policies" of the Chinese government, according to the statement, which is sponsored by organizations such as the Tibet Action Institute and the Campaign for Uyghurs. The coalition accuses the International Olympic Committee of prioritizing monetary profit over human suffering and ignoring the human rights abuses of the host country.

The statement says it is up to the international community to take action and calls on individual athletes to "use their platforms to stop injustice." The Beijing Games are scheduled to begin next February, less than nine months from now. The potential boycott of the 2022 Games due to allegations of China's alleged abuses toward Uyghurs and Tibetans has become a contentious topic both within the United States and worldwide. Three weeks after his inauguration earlier this year, President Joe Biden confronted Chinese President Xi Jinping about China's "unfair" economic practices, their targeted crackdown in Hong Kong and human rights abuses in Xinjiang. In late March, the U.S. State Department released its annual human rights report, which was harshly critical of China for its mass detention of Uyghur Muslims and the disappearance of several journalists reporting on the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan. Last month, a state department spokesman acknowledged America would consider boycotting the Beijing games. Senator Rick Scott (R-Fla.) has written to German Chancellor Angela Merkel,

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other world leaders declaring, “Communist China cannot be given a global platform to whitewash its crimes.” However, last week, the head of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee wrote to Congress arguing “an athlete boycott of the Olympic and Paralympic Games is not the solution to geopolitical issues.” The International Olympic Committee has said it must remain “neutral” and nonpartisan, with IOC President Thomas Bach claiming: “We are not a super-world government.” China has continually denied accusations it has engaged in genocide against the Uyghur people. There is a congressional hearing scheduled in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to deliberate a possible boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics. “The Chinese Communist Party is engaged in a merciless crackdown on Chinese human rights defenders, activists, faith communities and journalists and implementing an intense strategy of intimidation and geopolitical bullying against Taiwan,” read Monday’s joint statement. (Beer, 2021)

Human Rights Watch highlights the Chinese mistreatment of the Uyghurs in an April 19, 2021 article entitled, “China: Crimes Against Humanity in Xinjiang.”

The Chinese government is committing crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the northwest region of Xinjiang, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The Chinese leadership is responsible for widespread and systematic policies of mass detention, torture, and cultural persecution, among other offenses. Coordinated international action is needed to sanction those responsible, advance accountability, and press the Chinese government to reverse course. The 53-page report, “‘Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots’: China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims,” authored with assistance from Stanford Law School’s Human Rights & Conflict Resolution Clinic, draws on newly available information from Chinese government documents, human rights groups, the media, and scholars to assess Chinese government actions in Xinjiang within the international legal framework. The report identified a range of abuses against Turkic Muslims that amount to offenses committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against a population: mass arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, mass surveillance, cultural and religious erasure, separation of families, forced returns to China, forced labor, and sexual violence and violations of reproductive rights. “Chinese authorities have systematically persecuted Turkic Muslims – their lives, their religion, their culture,” said Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch. “Beijing has said it’s providing ‘vocational training’ and ‘deradicalization,’ but that rhetoric can’t obscure a grim reality of crimes against humanity.” Crimes against humanity are considered among the gravest human rights abuses under international law.

The Chinese government’s oppression of Turkic Muslims is not a new phenomenon, but in recent years it has reached unprecedented levels. In addition to mass detention and pervasive restrictions on practicing Islam, there is increasing evidence of forced labor, broad surveillance, and unlawful separation of children from their families. “It’s increasingly clear that Chinese government policies and practices against the Turkic Muslim population in Xinjiang meet the standard for crimes against humanity under international criminal law,” said Beth Van Schaack, faculty affiliate, Stanford Center for Human Rights & International Justice. “The government’s failure to stop these crimes, let alone punish those responsible, shows the need for strong and coordinated international action.” Human Rights Watch and the Stanford Human Rights Clinic urged the United Nations Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution to create a commission of inquiry with authority to investigate allegations of crimes against humanity, identify officials responsible for abuses, and provide a road map for holding them accountable. The UN

high commissioner for human rights should also monitor and report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang and keep the Human Rights Council regularly informed. Concerned governments should impose coordinated visa bans, travel bans, and targeted individual sanctions on authorities responsible for criminal acts. They should also pursue domestic criminal cases under the concept of “universal jurisdiction,” which allows prosecution of grave crimes committed abroad. And they should adopt trade restrictions and other measures to end the use of forced labor in China. “It is increasingly clear that a coordinated global response is needed to end China’s crimes against humanity against Turkic Muslims,” Richardson said. “That China is a powerful state makes it all the more important for holding it accountable for its unrelenting abuses.” (Human Rights Watch, 2021)

Division of Ground

Affirmative

Affirmatives will have a plethora of avenues to develop affirmative cases to substantially increase strategic competition with the People’s Republic of China. The focus of this paper’s author would allow for partnerships with other nation States in the areas of technology, trade, national security, military, science, space, global health and/or human rights to counter the influence of the People’s Republic of China.

The partnering countries of the resolution, if needed, would be recommended to include one or more members of “the Quad” – a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia and India. The Quad appears to be focused on issues affecting the Indio-Pacific region to balance China’s growing power.

Depending on the actual wording of the resolution, we could see cases in the following areas:

- China’s chronic trade surpluses
- China’s exchange rate policy
- China’s industrial policy
- Transfer of technology
- Foreign energy development
- Global supply chain diversification and management.
- Global Health Initiatives
- International Infrastructure investment
- Reliable energy infrastructure.
- Digital Technology and Connectivity
- Digital connectivity and cybersecurity partnership.
- Condemning anti-Asian racism and discrimination.
- Commitment and support for allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.
- Cooperation with ASEAN.
- Enhancing the United States-Taiwan partnership.
- Treatment of Taiwan government.
- Diplomatic support and economic engagement with Pacific island countries.
- Security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.
- Southeast Asia maritime security programs
- Foreign military financing compact in the Indo-Pacific.
- Space Race
- Prioritizing excess naval vessel transfers for the Indo-Pacific.
- Maritime freedom of operations – International Waterways
- Airspace freedom of operations – Indo-Pacific
- South China Sea – Artificial Land

- Military installations overseas.

Negative

Negatives will also have a plethora of avenues to develop negative cases to combat the affirmative position.

There are numerous arguments available to counter the case side arguments of the affirmative. First, not all experts agree that China represents a major threat to the United States, economically or militarily.

As to the economic threat, consider the following statement from Jonah Goldberg at the American Enterprise Institute:

Given all the China rhetoric, you'd think we were neck-and-neck with them. Well, the United States ranks 13th in per-capita GDP (about \$60,000 in 2017 dollars). But all the nations beating us have fewer than 10 million inhabitants. We're larger than all of them combined. Meanwhile China ranks 79th – behind Botswana, Bulgaria, and Belarus. China's median income is a fraction of ours, while Luxembourg and Switzerland are killing us. And yet we never hear politicians talk about the need to outcompete Luxembourgers or how the Swiss are winning the future. (Goldberg, 2021)

Goldberg views claims about competition with China as political talking points which are little more than crass appeals to nationalism:

The consensus on competitiveness extends far beyond the first couple. Economic competition is one of the oldest and most bipartisan cliches in American politics. And while it's not entirely nonsense, it is mostly nonsense. During the Cold War, it was more defensible. The Soviet Union and the United States battled in a decades-long struggle not just for military and geopolitical dominance but to win hearts and minds about who had the better system. Even within the context of the Cold War, the competitive spirit led to excess. In 1989, about nine months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, policymakers were fretting that the Soviet Union could beat us in the race to develop high-definition TV. There are three reasons politicians deploy the rhetoric of competitiveness. First, it lends a kind of macho heft to what politicians and policymakers want to do anyway. Second, it appeals to team spirit. Conceptually, it's basically nationalism stripped of its unpleasant connotations. The message is: We all need to get on board with this agenda to beat the other guys. That's why Biden raised the supposed problem of reaching consensus. The upshot is we can't waste time arguing amongst ourselves. Third, it fuels the assumption that policymakers actually know what to do to make us more competitive. We can't just let the market work – we need to invest in this or that, the way we invest in munitions factories during a war. This was the argument politicians made about Japan in the 1980s. We were in a race to win the future with Japan and so we had to mimic their industrial policy. And this is how politicians talk about China today. (Goldberg, 2021)

Goldberg adds, “Indeed, one indicator the competitiveness claim is mostly about marketing and short-circuiting debate is that politicians will use the language of economic competition to justify things they'd want to do anyway” (Goldberg, 2021).

Nor is there agreement that China's efforts to use its economic and military power to gain allies is a winning strategy for them. In fact, the RAND Corporation report, *Understanding influence in the strategic competition with China*, authored by Michael Mazarr and his associates concludes that China's efforts to bully other countries is actually counterproductive:

One major theme in these recent events has been China's recurring tendency to undertake extreme, ham-handed, and counterproductive actions of belligerent diplomacy in service of its viewpoint. China's so-called Wolf Warrior cadre of diplomats – a group

of officials, named for a 2015 nationalist Chinese action film – has generated blowback with an increasingly belligerent assertion of Chinese interests. Beijing’s “clumsy and ugly disinformation campaign” in Europe, according to one European journalist, has ended up alienating EU governments, prompting a formal report to catalog China’s malicious propaganda. The writer concluded, “Somehow, Chinese officials have managed to offend Europeans across the continent who usually agree on nothing. At the beginning of the year, the calendar for 2020 was filled with Sino-European summits celebrating ever deeper ties. Instead, the pandemic is likely to be the occasion for Europeans to begin emancipating themselves from a bad relationship.” (Mazarr et al., 2021, p. 129)

Negative teams could argue that the appropriate foreign policy vis-à-vis China is “economic engagement” as opposed to “strategic competition.” Numerous foreign policy scholars continue to argue that the United States should welcome the rise of China, rather than to create a self-fulfilling prophecy by defining China as an enemy. Consider the following reaction of Sara Hsu, formerly professor of economics at the State University of New York at New Paltz, to the efforts of the U.S. Senate to promote the policy of strategic competition with China:

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has backed the Strategic Competition Act of 2021, which labels China a strategic competitor in multiple areas, including economics, technology, and military security. While there are some legitimate issues between the United States and China, the text of the act is anti-Chinese and many areas of focus are poorly conceived.

Certainly, there are areas of conflict between the United States and China, which have been highlighted by the China-U.S. trade war and other events in recent years. These include the issue of technology transfer, U.S. firms’ ability to compete in China, Chinese human rights abuses, data privacy, and cyber conflict. These are real issues that must be addressed by the United States and its allies as well as by the U.S. and China.

However, the act frames China’s actions in regard to these issues and others in offensive terms. For example, the act states, “It is the policy of the United States, in pursuing strategic competition with the PRC, ...to expose the PRC’s use of corruption, repression, coercion, and other malign behavior to attain unfair economic advantage and deference of other nations to its political and strategic objectives.” The text also asserts that “The PRC is promoting its governance model and attempting to weaken other models of governance by— (A) undermining democratic institutions; (B) subverting financial institutions; (C) coercing businesses to accommodate the policies of the PRC; and (D) using disinformation to disguise the nature of [its] actions...”

Having interacted with some Chinese government officials after the trade war began, it is clear that inflammatory rhetoric does very little to achieve an atmosphere of compromise. In fact, anti-Chinese rhetoric from the United States has rendered Chinese officials and other experts quite bitter and confounded. (Hsu, 2021)

When partnering with countries listed in the resolution, the negative could present counterplans claiming that countries outside of the resolution would be a better partner to accomplish the mission of the affirmative. The counterplan ground would be a strong argument for the negative.

Depending on the actual wording of the resolution, we could see negative cases potentially making arguments in the following areas:

- Counterplans – Alternative Partnering Countries
- Counterplans – Including the United Nations
- Disadvantages – Trade-Off

- Disadvantages – Relations
- Disadvantages – Linking to the Competitive Strategy of the United States
- Kritiks – Capitalism
- Kritiks – Neoliberalism
- Kritiks – Militarism
- Kritiks – Colonialism

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Potential Resolution Wordings

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its strategic competition with the People's Republic of China. (*author's preference*)

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its strategic competition in trade, technology, science and/or global health with the People's Republic of China by partnering with one or more of the following: India, Japan and/or Australia.

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its strategic competition in land acquisitions, space exploration or maritime navigation with the People's Republic of China by partnering with one or more of the following: India, Japan and/or Australia.

There are tons of possibilities for resolutions with this topic. The author prefers and recommends the first resolution.

Key Definitions

The majority of the terms we have seen before with the exception of “strategic competition.” The key definitions will focus on this term.

Strategic Competition Defined

Anthony Lake and David Ochmanek in the 2001 book, *The Real and Ideal: Essays on International Relations in Honor of Richard H. Ullman*:

“For our purposes, strategic competition is defined as conscious moves by states to use political, military, economic, and culture ties to promote their long-term interests over those of their neighbors in a manner that stresses relative gains in power and influence, rather than joint gains and cooperative activity” (Lake & Ochmanek, 2001, p. 285).

Lt. Colonel Scott McDonald provides an in-depth explanation of the term, “strategic competition” in the context of U.S.-China relations in a November 2020 article in the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. While only portions of the article are listed below, reading the entire article will provide a holistic understanding of the term, both from the U.S. and Chinese perspective:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), strategy is the “art or practice of planning the future direction or outcome of something; formulation or implementation of a plan, scheme, or course of action, esp. of a long-term or ambitious nature.” Strategic is defined as “relating to, or characterized by the identification of long-term or overall aims and interests and the means of achieving them; designed, planned or conceived to serve a particular purpose or achieve a particular objective.” Similarly, the Xinhua Dictionary defines strategy (zhànlüè) as “concerning war’s overall plans and guidance. It, according to the elements of military affairs, politics, economy, geography, etc. of both hostile parties, considers the relationship between every aspect and phase of the overall war situation, to formulate the preparation and use of military forces.” These definitions point to a general agreement in the two languages. In both traditions, strategy deals with identifying the ultimate objectives of an enterprise to array the tools one has to use appropriately. While the English definition focuses more directly on top-level interests, the Chinese definition includes the range of factors that influence “overall plans and guidance.” (McDonald, 2020, p. 4)

Competition is easier to parse. OED provides “[t]he action of endeavouring to gain what another endeavors to gain at the same time; the striving of two or more for the same object; rivalry,” while the Xinhua definition for (jìngzhēng) is “mutually vying to beat each other.” In fact, the character translated as “beat” could also be translated as “defeating” or “being superior to,” but leaving it as “beat” allows the definition to suit many types of interstate competition. For consistency, and in an attempt to meet both linguistic traditions, this article defines strategic competition as active rivalry between states that perceive their fundamental interests under threat by the opposite party. (McDonald, 2020, p. 5)

In sum, the United States has been a consistent advocate of cooperation since the end of the Cold War. However, that cooperation was predicated on an assumption that long-term interests were aligned and that engagement with the PRC would ultimately change it into a more liberal state domestically and another “stakeholder” in the US-influenced liberal international order. That these changes did not occur, combined with a PRC increasingly interested in challenging that order, has caused the United States to rethink its approach. Thus, while Washington has not completely given up on cooperation, it now believes a state of competition exists and is beginning to alter US policies to meet that reality. (McDonald, 2020, p. 9)

