



Views from the People's Republic of China on US-China Relations since the Beginning of the Biden Administration

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Background

This memo is part of a larger effort by CNA's China & Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Division that is examining how allies, partners, and the PRC are assessing US policy in the Indo-Pacific. It focuses on how PRC subject matter experts were viewing US policy toward Beijing during the initial first few months of the new US administration.

Introduction

The inauguration of President Joseph Biden in January 2021 presented an opportunity for the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to reassess the trajectory of their relationship. Just as political analysts and "China watchers" in the United States have watched the Biden Administration's approach to the PRC with interest, so too have "US watchers" in the PRC. These US watchers include professors at key PRC universities, retired government and military officials, and researchers at government-affiliated think tanks. This paper captures the themes articulated by these subject matter experts (SMEs) from the PRC (henceforth referred to as PRC SMEs) in 67 articles published from January 2021 through July 2021 on US-PRC relations, particularly in the areas of foreign affairs and national security. The views of the SMEs in this paper should not be construed as official PRC policy, nor is the sample of articles comprehensive. However, the views in this paper are indicative of the realm of permissible public discussion about US-PRC relations by PRC SMEs, some of whom have access to decision-makers in China through their institutional affiliations. Key themes identified in these articles are below. The appendix contains a list of events in US-PRC relations during the period of analysis.

Key themes

- Although PRC SMEs initially viewed the Biden Administration as a window of opportunity for US-PRC relations, as time passed, PRC SMEs viewed the Biden Administration's approach to China as not fundamentally different than that of the Donald Trump Administration.
- PRC SMEs view the current administration as increasingly employing multilateral institutions and closer relationships to US allies and partners as a way to contain the PRC.
- Despite challenges and mistrust in the US-PRC relationship, PRC SMEs emphasize that the US should focus on cooperation and common interests in a variety of policy areas.
- Some PRC SMEs dismiss the Biden Administration's "3C" (compete, cooperate, confront) policy towards China¹ as a "logically flawed" and "inappropriate" framework for US-PRC relations.
- PRC SMEs discourage what they see as an issues-based approach by the US for US-PRC relations, and instead advocate for establishing general principles and frameworks for engagement.

- Some PRC SMEs suggest that an unspoken deal could exist between Washington and Beijing (and perhaps has existed in the past), whereby the US would not interfere with PRC internal affairs and the PRC would not upset the US-led global order.
- SMEs agree that the US and the PRC should strengthen military crisis management, but also recognize that the two countries' different understandings of crisis management may preclude agreement in this area.
- PRC SMEs see the enhancement of the US-Taiwan relationship as "hollowing out" the US' "One China Policy," potentially increasing the risk of conflict over the island.
- PRC SMEs suggest that US diplomatic and military activities regarding the South China Sea are legally questionable and primarily serve US, not regional, interests.

Discussion of Key Themes

Although PRC SMEs initially viewed the Biden Administration as a window of opportunity for US-PRC relations, as time passed, PRC SMEs viewed the Biden Administration's approach to China as not fundamentally different than that of the Trump Administration.

At the beginning of the Biden Administration, PRC SMEs were cautiously optimistic about how the Biden Administration would influence US-PRC relations. In February 2021, Tao Wenzhao, long affiliated with the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS),ⁱ called the inauguration of the Biden Administration a "window of hope for rebuilding US-PRC relations," while also acknowledging that there were still "impediments and restrictions" in rebuilding the relationship. Similarly, President Yuan Peng of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)ⁱⁱ and Assistant Research Fellow Sun Chenghao of CICIR acknowledged a "window" of opportunity to mitigate tension in the US-PRC relationship, while cautioning that the window would not be open for "too wide" or for "too long."²

Other SMEs highlighted some qualities in President Biden that they viewed as different from former president Trump. Yang Zejun, Researcher at Nanjing University's Collaborative Innovation Center of South China Sea Studies, anticipated that the Biden Administration would be relatively more "pragmatic, rational, and balanced."³ Zou Zhibo, Vice Dean of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at CASS, anticipated that unlike under the "maverick" Trump, US foreign policy under Biden would return to a more "traditional diplomatic line."⁴ However, many PRC SMEs still believed that despite these differences, Biden, like his predecessor, would seek to "contain China"⁵ because of the enduring US perception of China as a strategic competitor,⁶ and also because being "tough on China" is domestically popular in the United States.⁷

As time went on, PRC SMEs stopped discussing the Biden Administration as a window of opportunity and characterized the Biden Administration's China policy as an extension of that of the Trump Administration. Based on the data collected for this paper, discussion of the Biden Administration as a window of opportunity for the US-PRC relationship ceased just prior to the start of the Anchorage Summit in March, the first high-level in-person meeting of US and PRC officials during the Biden Administration.⁸ Although a direct correlation is difficult to establish, it is worth pointing out that prior to the summit, the Biden Administration held the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Australia, India, and Japan and sanctioned PRC and Hong Kong officials in opposition to the PRC's handling of Hong Kong.⁹ Xiao He, Deputy Director and Associate Researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics at CASS, characterized these actions

ⁱ CASS is affiliated with the PRC State Council.

ⁱⁱ CICIR is affiliated with the PRC Ministry of State Security.

as “destroying” US-PRC relations and called Biden’s foreign policy towards Beijing as “Trumpism without Trump.”¹⁰ By the end of June 2021, following expanded US science and technology sanctions on PRC companies and the passage of the US Innovation and Competition Act,¹¹ PRC SMEs such as Zhang Monan, Senior Fellow at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE),ⁱⁱⁱ declared that Biden’s policy towards China was “out-Trumping Trump on China.”¹²

PRC SMEs view the current administration as increasingly employing multilateral institutions and closer relationships to US allies and partners as a way to contain the PRC.

In what they view as a concerning departure from Trump-era policies, PRC SMEs see the Biden Administration as increasingly employing multilateral institutions and allies and partners to contain Beijing and challenge the PRC on a variety of issues, such as territorial claims in the South China Sea, economic competition, and human rights.¹³

- **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad):** PRC SMEs view the Biden Administration as increasingly consolidating the Quad. Shi Yinhong, a professor at the School of International Relations of Renmin University of China, observes that Biden’s promotion of the Quad in the first two months of the Biden Administration was “extremely fast” and that China has maintained a “high degree of strategic vigilance about it.”¹⁴ An Gang, Research Fellow at the Center for International Strategy and Security at Tsinghua University, argues that the Biden Administration will promote the Quad and Quad-Plus¹⁵ mechanisms as part of his enforcement of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which under his administration has a “more clarified goal of containing and curbing China.”¹⁶
- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, Australia:** In writing about the Biden Administration’s South China Sea policy, Colonel Liu Lin of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) anticipates that the Biden Administration may “place more importance on Southeast Asia,” providing more military assistance and diplomatic and legal support to ASEAN countries. She emphasizes that “unlike Trump,” the Biden Administration may draw in ASEAN countries in a more “strategic way” while at the same time strengthening cooperation with countries outside the Southeast Asian region, such as Japan and Australia, to “jointly place pressure on China.”¹⁷
- **Group of Seven (G7):** In response to the G7 Summit held on June 11, Nie Wenjuan, Deputy Director of the Institute of International Relations at the China Foreign Affairs University,^{iv} says that in hindsight, “the G7 summit was obviously meant to coordinate responses to China.”¹⁸ Zhao Minghao, Researcher at the Charhar Institute,^v highlights that the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative proposed by the Biden Administration at the G7 Summit “was seen as a major strategic counterweight” to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He argues that the need for the Biden Administration to respond to the BRI proves the BRI’s “value,” and he further criticizes the B3W as placing “too much emphasis on competition and confrontation with China, thus undermining its legitimacy.”¹⁹

ⁱⁱⁱ CCIEE is affiliated with the National Development and Reform Commission.

^{iv} China Foreign Affairs University is affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

^v The Charhar Institute states that it is a “non-governmental and non-partisan think-tank.” However, some believe that it may be affiliated with the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) because some of its leadership have connections to the CPPCC. See: “Co-Chair of the Culture and Peace Committee (Wang Guoqing),” Charhar Institute, accessed Aug. 20, 2021, <http://en.charhar.org.cn/index.php?a=lists&catid=67>; “Charhar Leadership (entry for Charhar Chairman, Dr. Han Fangming),” Charhar Institute, accessed Aug. 20, 2021, <http://en.charhar.org.cn/index.php?a=lists&catid=43>.

- **European Union (EU):** PRC SMEs highlight what is sometimes referred to as the “values-oriented” diplomacy employed by the Biden Administration to rally other democratic countries to counter the PRC.²⁰ One example of this is US efforts to influence EU countries. An Gang states that the Biden Administration “leveraged Xinjiang-related issues” and “instigated US-EU coordinated sanctions,” resulting in the “suspension of ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement for Investment” by the EU parliament and “driving a wedge into the ever-deepening China-EU cooperation.”²¹ In an article that alleges that the US is seeking to contain China through the human rights cause in Xinjiang, Su Jingxiang of CICIR highlights that “some EU countries, including Germany, are following the American example to propose a supply chain law that would oblige companies to defend human rights and not to cooperate with businesses that violate human rights or that use forced labor.”²²
- **India:** A few SMEs are especially attentive to the increasing closeness between the United States and India. Former vice minister of foreign affairs He Yafei characterizes the US-India relationship as a “quasi alliance” resulting from their overlapping strategic goals and their “common strategy against China.”²³ Zheng Yongnian, Dean of the Global and Contemporary China Institute for Advanced Study at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, argues that “India is the key” to US-Indo-Pacific relations, stating that “once India is ready to cooperate with the US, a maritime blockade of China will take shape.”²⁴ In response to Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s trip to India at the end of July, Fudan University Professor of International Studies Lin Minwang asserted that the “China Factor” has become the “glue that unites” the United States and India, with both countries using the Indo-Pacific Strategy “to contain China.”²⁵

Despite challenges and mistrust in the US-PRC relationship, PRC SMEs emphasize that the US should focus on cooperation and common interests in a variety of policy areas.

PRCs SMEs frequently emphasize cooperation and common interests as the preferred way forward for US-PRC relations.²⁶ Zhu Feng, Executive Director of the Collaborative Innovation Center of South China Sea Studies at Nanjing University, not only portrays cooperation as China’s preference but also implies that the US needs to cooperate with China to achieve its own national and global objectives. He states that whether “battling the COVID-19 pandemic, revitalizing the economy, or addressing climate change,” the Biden Administration will “undoubtedly need cooperation with China to assure its own achievements in these fields.”²⁷ Other areas PRC SMEs have proposed for cooperation include international arms control²⁸ and even the issue of aging populations.²⁹ Though PRC SMEs favor cooperation, they also acknowledge that it may not always be possible, especially given their view that the US is attempting to isolate, contain, and weaken China.³⁰ According to Li Yan, Deputy Director of the Institute of American Studies at CICIR, China must recognize the long-term nature of competition with the US and remain committed to cooperation, with a “clear-eyed recognition of American intentions and motives.”³¹

Areas PRC SMEs Identify for Cooperation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • COVID-19 • Economic issues • International arms control • Aging populations

Cybersecurity as a difficult but possible area for cooperation.

In July, tensions over cybersecurity flared when the US along with a broad group of allies condemned the PRC for cyberespionage.³² Curiously, following this incident and despite past difficulties in US-PRC cooperation on cybersecurity, Lu Chuanying, Fellow and Secretary-General of the Research Center for the International Governance of Cyberspace at the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS),^{vi} still saw

^{vi} SIIS is affiliated with the Shanghai Municipal Government.

cyber cooperation as a potential, albeit difficult, option. Lu acknowledges that US-PRC cybersecurity cooperation has made “little progress” since Beijing and Washington reached the six consensus on cybertheft in 2015 and that “confrontation has intensified.” He asserts that “from China’s perspective,” “the overt tracing of cyberattacks back to the Chinese government or military, international initiatives that position China as an assumed enemy, and government-wide crackdowns on tech companies, such as Huawei, are seen as seriously undermining the trust that is fundamental to China-US cooperation.” He further asserts that the US government and US businesses frequently accuse the PRC government of hacking, “but rarely produce any evidence, resulting in a huge number of unsupported accusations.” He proposes that in the event that cyberattacks are discovered, the two sides can “work together” to discover the truth.³³

Some PRC SMEs dismiss the Biden Administration’s “3C” (compete, cooperate, confront) approach as a “logically flawed” and “inappropriate” framework for US-PRC relations.

Called the “3C framework” by PRC SMEs, this framework conveys that the US will “cooperate with China where it can, compete where it should, and confront when it must.”³⁴ Some PRC authors assert that this 3C approach is not an appropriate framework for US-PRC relations. An Gang, Research Fellow at Tsinghua University’s Center for International Strategy and Security, argues that the 3C framework is “neither scientific nor feasible” because not all issues are easily classified in this way, remarking that economics and trade, which “once supported the development of bilateral relations,” are currently full of competition and friction, whereas the military, a “highly competitive and adversarial field,” is “better at risk control than others.”³⁵ Li Yan, Deputy Director of the Institute of American Studies at CICIR, calls the policy “logically flawed” or at least “perplexing” because competition, collaboration, and confrontation “are semantically and logically in conflict.” From the PRC perspective, he states, “If two major countries are in fierce competition or even confrontation, how can they carry out genuine cooperation at the same time?”³⁶ Huang Renwei, Executive Dean of the Institute of Belt and Road & Global Governance at Fudan University in Shanghai, is also skeptical of the framework, suggesting that it implies a hierarchy of values. He asserts, “Americans know very well that competition comes first.” He believes that if competition is unfavorable to the US, then they will “not hesitate to go to confrontation” and that cooperation is “subordinate to competition.”³⁷

SMEs discourage what they see as an issue-based approach by the US for US-PRC relations and instead advocate for establishing general principles and frameworks for engagement.

Instead of an issue-based approach to bilateral relations, PRC SMEs tend to highlight the merits of a principle-driven relationship. As explained by Wang Jisi, President of Peking University’s Institute of International and Strategic Studies, people in China like the idea of “seeking common ground while reserving differences” and “[defining] common ground by a set of principles,” but people in the United States “tend to focus on hard issues, such as tensions over Taiwan and the South China Sea.” According to Wang, whereas the PRC wants to set up principles before trying to solve specific problems, US officials “are eager to address the problems before they are ready to improve the relationship.” This disconnect causes the US to “criticize the PRC for not taking their practical concerns seriously” and the PRC to complain that the US is “creating obstacles to improving relations.”³⁸ Yuan Peng, President of CICIR, similarly stressed the importance of establishing a framework for the relationship. He asserts that the “new type of major power

relationship”^{vii} proposed by Xi Jinping for bilateral relations is still the best framework that has been proposed thus far and allows for an alternative way of thinking beyond the Thucydides Trap and other constructs that predict conflict between the US and China. Retired PLA major general Yao Yunzhu (formerly with the Academy of Military Sciences) argues that because the PRC and the US have the responsibility of maintaining world peace and regional stability, they must “discuss, negotiate, and eventually agree upon a relationship of strategic stability.” She asserts that in order to do that, the two countries “need to first explore a conceptual construct” of what a relationship of strategic stability means and how it differs from the US-Soviet Union relationship during the Cold War.³⁹

Some PRC SMEs suggest that an unspoken deal could exist between the United States and the PRC (and perhaps has existed in the past), whereby the US would not interfere with PRC internal affairs and the PRC would not upset the US global order.

Peking University’s Wang Jisi asserts that “until the current downward spiral in the bilateral relationship, which began in 2017, Washington and Beijing maintained an implicit understanding: the United States would not openly attempt to destabilize China’s internal order, and in turn, China would not intentionally weaken the US-led international order.” Under this framework, argues Wang, the two countries “tremendously expanded their commercial and civic links—to the point of interdependence.” With the unraveling of this implicit understanding, however, “the United States seems determined to weaken the CCP [Chinese Communist Party], and China appears intent on defying US leadership of global institutions and Western values more broadly.”⁴⁰ Sun Chenghao, Assistant Research Fellow at CICIR, suggests a similar idea, stating that the two countries could draw a “bottom line that avoids vicious competition,” which would mean that “China is confident the US will not undermine its sovereignty, security, and development interests, and the US is confident that China has no intention of challenging or replacing the US on the world stage, let alone driving the US out of Asia or the western Pacific.”⁴¹ In an essay defending Beijing’s military expenditures, Luo Yuan, retired PLA major general (formerly with the Academy of Military Sciences and current Executive Vice President of the China Strategic Culture Promotion Association), asserts that it would be “easy” for China to reduce its military expenditures if the United States “dissolves its military alliances against China in the Asia-Pacific,” withdraws support for “‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces,” stops arms sales to Taiwan, stops “making provocations” in the South China Sea, and stops intervening in China’s internal affairs. Otherwise, Luo writes, “There will be no way.”⁴²

PRC SMEs agree that Washington and Beijing should strengthen military crisis management, but also recognize that the two countries’ different understandings of crisis management may preclude agreement in this area.

Some SMEs opined that since the US-PRC relationship has morphed into one of strategic competition, the creation of crisis management mechanisms is necessary, especially related to Taiwan and the South China Sea.⁴³ Retired PLA major general Yao Yunzhu asserts that now that both countries can “little rely on strategic trust” to avoid a crisis, they “must improve the existing crisis management regimes, including updating the code of behavior in close encounters in the air and at sea, regulating the use of communication

^{vii} Introduced in 2012 by Xi Jinping, the “New Type of Major Power Relationship” for US-PRC relations emphasizes the principles of “no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation.” It was established in the context of the US “pivot to Asia” under the Obama Administration as well as the PRC’s own goals to maintain a peaceful global environment as it develops. See: Li Zhen, “Xi Jinping’s Political Wisdom in Constructing a New Type of Sino-US Relationship between Major Powers (*Xi Jinping Goujian Zhong Mei Xinxing Daguo Guanxi de Zhengzhi Zhihui*; 习近平构建中美新型大国关系的政治智慧),” *Qiushi*, Jun. 24, 2019, http://www.qstheory.cn/lqikan/2019-06/24/c_1124664986.htm.

channels and clarifying protocols and procedures when emergencies do occur.” This may be “the most important area in which the two militaries can work together,” Yao states.⁴⁴

A few PRC SMEs acknowledge that a fundamental difference in the understanding of crisis management exists between the United States and the PRC. Retired senior colonel Zhou Bo, a former official at the Central Military Commission’s Office of International Military Cooperation, writes that regarding the issues of Taiwan and the South China Sea, the US views crisis management as a “tactical issue of avoiding collisions,” but for the PRC, it is a strategic-level issue concerning its national sovereignty and security. According to Zhou, this difference in perspective makes reaching consensus on crisis management difficult; for example, the US may believe it is seeking safety when it “provokes” the PRC regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea, but the PRC’s point of view is that the “safest” option is for the US not to operate in such sensitive areas to begin with.⁴⁵ Tsinghua University’s An Gang similarly states that though the US military wishes to establish command-level communications with its PRC counterparts, the communication it promotes focuses on the control of military conduct “at a technical level,” rather than “demonstrating good faith in strategic coordination.”⁴⁶

PRC SMEs see the enhancement of the US-Taiwan relationship as “hollowing out” the “One China Policy,” potentially increasing the risk of conflict over the island.

PRC SMEs view the Biden Administration’s pro-Taiwan actions as a continuation of the “hollowing out” of the US’ “One China Policy.”⁴⁷ Li Yan of CICIR states that President Biden is following through on many of Trump’s initiatives that eroded the “One China Policy,” such as relaxing restrictions on contacts between US and Taiwan officials, enhancing US-Taiwan coast guard cooperation, and assisting on consolidating Taiwan’s “so-called diplomatic relations.” Li also argues that the US is enhancing the relationship not only to balance power across the Taiwan Strait and to deter Beijing from attempting to take over Taiwan, but also because Taiwan has renewed value to the US as a top global producer of semiconductors.⁴⁸

Several PRC SMEs view US policies toward Taiwan as increasing the risk of conflict over the island.⁴⁹ In an article about Beijing’s response to three US senators visiting Taiwan in June, Zhu Songling, Director and Professor of the Institute of Cross-Strait Relations at Beijing Union University, suggests that just because the PRC has not always reacted with force to US activities in the Taiwan Strait in the past does not mean it will refrain from doing so in the future. He argues that the “accumulation of such incidents may be dangerous.” He asserts that the US assumption that Beijing will respond only verbally demonstrates “ignorance of Chinese politics” and argues that constantly testing the “bottom line” of the PRC on the Taiwan issue will lead Beijing to change its current policy of “peaceful reunification” with Taiwan, which will result in “great damage” to US interests in the western Pacific.⁵⁰ Yan Xuetong, Dean of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University and former CICIR analyst, also warns that “the risk of conflict over Taiwan, especially, is growing.” He states that the more other countries support Taiwan’s “secessionist policies,” the more the PLA will carry out military exercises to deter Taiwan. In the meantime, Beijing hopes to reach a tacit understanding with Washington that maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait is a “shared interest.”⁵¹

PRC SMEs suggest that US activities regarding the South China Sea are legally questionable and primarily serve US, not regional, interests.

PRC SMEs note that while the US military conducts freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and rallies other countries to oppose Beijing on the South China Sea issue, it is “a well-known fact” that the United States is “one of the very few countries in the current international community that has not yet joined the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.”⁵² Ye Qiang, Assistant Researcher at the National Institute

for South China Sea Studies (NISCSS),^{viii} asserts that “while the United States requires other countries to abide by international law,” it “habitually regards itself as an exception to the constraints of international law.”⁵³

Additionally, PRC SMEs suggest that US South China Sea policies are self-serving and unhelpful for fomenting peace in the region. Song Runqian and Wu Lei, both Assistant Researchers at NISCSS, argue that the US policies in the South China Sea are “interest-oriented + threat-oriented.” They argue that the United States is becoming “anxious” about China’s strength and influence, so it is trying to use the South China Sea issue to compete with China to achieve the goal of maintaining its exclusive right to control the regional order.⁵⁴ In writing about the fifth anniversary of the South China Sea Arbitration tribunal decision (2016) that negated China’s claims to the South China Sea, President of NISCSS Wu Shicun claims that the “arbitration award” to the Philippines was nothing but a “tool” deliberately created by the United States for the purpose of sowing discord between China and ASEAN countries, disrupting the regional situation, and undermining peace and stability in the South China Sea—a frequent accusation about US actions in the region.⁵⁵ He further asserts that other countries have “widely recognized” the PRC’s “non-acceptance, non-participation, and non-recognition” stance on the case, claiming that the arbitration award has long been regarded as a “piece of waste paper” and thrown into the “garbage dump” of history—a decision that is “inevitable” to maintain long-term peace and stability in the South China Sea.⁵⁶

Concluding Thoughts

In the 67 articles consulted for this paper, there were common themes across the institutions and individuals represented in the sample. Some of the themes are not new or particularly surprising. For example, PRC officials have for years called for US-PRC relations to be guided by principles and frameworks instead of particular issues.⁵⁷ The themes at times also may seem contradictory; for example, the emphasis on particular areas for cooperation may appear to contradict calls to avoid issue-based cooperation. These differing points of view, however, may not be as contradictory as they appear at first glance. As the military crisis management example shows, PRC SMEs assert that unlike the United States, the PRC views Taiwan and the South China Sea as issues not to be addressed at the tactical level; from their perspective, the US should have an understanding of what these issues mean to the PRC at the strategic level. In other words, cooperating on particular issues and establishing principles on how to cooperate on them appear to go hand in hand for PRC SMEs.⁵⁸

Interestingly, no authors in any of the articles directly characterize the PRC as having any culpability for the state of US-PRC relations. This absence underlines a key difference between the “China watchers” in the US and the “US watchers” in the PRC. Whereas public discussion in the US is critical of both the US and China for the state of US-PRC relations, the public discussion in the PRC remains focused on US culpability—a characteristic that likely reflects the system in which PRC SMEs operate.

Despite this incomplete picture, the opinions of PRC SMEs offer valuable information about where much of their current, publicly available thinking stands on US-PRC relations. As Professor Wang Jisi of Peking University wrote in March prior to the Anchorage Summit, efforts for the US and China to communicate with each other should be “supplemented with an understanding of each other’s way of thinking.”⁵⁹ This paper represents an effort to ensure that US actors understand their PRC counterparts as both countries continue to navigate their relationship under the Biden Administration.

^{viii} NISCSS is affiliated with the State Council and has close ties to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Appendix A: Notable Events in US-PRC Relations during the First Six Months of the Biden Administration

The following are notable events in US-PRC relations that occurred during the first six months of the Biden Administration.

- January 20, 2021: Biden's inauguration is attended by Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the United States.⁶⁰
- February 5, 2021: USS *John S. McCain* (DDG 56) conducts a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands.⁶¹
- February 10, 2021: President Biden and President Xi hold a phone call.⁶²
- February 16, 2021: USS *Russell* (DDG 59) conducts a FONOP in the Spratly Islands.⁶³
- March 12, 2021: The Quadrilateral Security Summit, a meeting between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, convenes virtually.⁶⁴
- March 18–19, 2021: Meetings at the Anchorage Summit are held between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the US side and Yang Jiechi, China's most senior foreign policy official, and Wang Yi, PRC foreign minister, on the PRC side.⁶⁵
- April 15–16: US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry and China Special Envoy for Climate Change Xie Zhenhua meet in Shanghai to discuss aspects of the climate crisis.⁶⁶
- June 6, 2021: Three US senators travel to Taiwan on a US Air Force C-17 for a visit with Tsai Ing-wen and to announce a donation of 750,000 vaccine doses.⁶⁷
- June 8, 2021: The Senate passes the US Innovation and Competition Act, a \$250 billion bill aimed to ensure that the US stays technologically competitive with China.⁶⁸
- June 11, 2021: Secretary of State Antony Blinken holds a phone call with his PRC counterpart Yang Jiechi, the PRC's most senior foreign policy official.⁶⁹
- June 11–13, 2021: Leaders of G7 countries meet in Cornwall in the United Kingdom for a summit.⁷⁰
- July 15, 2021: A US Air Force cargo plane stops in Taiwan for 30 minutes to facilitate the transition of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) director.⁷¹
- July 20, 2021: The United States accuses China of hacking Microsoft. A broad coalition of US allies also condemn China for cyberattacks globally.⁷²
- July 25–26, 2021: Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman visits China to meet State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and other PRC officials.⁷³

¹ For more information on this policy, see: Laura Kelly, “Blinken Calls US-China Relations Biggest Challenge of Century in Major Speech,” *The Hill*, Mar. 3, 2021, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/541426-blinken-calls-us-china-relations-biggest-challenge-of-century-in-major>.

² Nine articles (about 13 percent of the articles in dataset) discussed the Biden Administration as a possible opportunity for Sino-US relations to improve. For example, see: Sun Chenghao, “The Biden Effect,” *China-US Focus*, Feb. 8, 2021, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/the-biden-effect>; Yuan Peng, “Yuan Peng: The High-level Strategic dialogue is Imminent, Where is China-US relations Heading? (*Yuan Peng: Gaoceng Zhanlüe Duihua Zaiji Zhong Mei Guanxi Xiang He Chuqu?*; 袁鹏：高层战略对话在即 中美关系向何处去？), *China News Service*, Mar. 17, 2021, <https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2021-03-17/doc-ikkntiam4184201.shtml>.

³ Yang Zejun, “The First Sign of the Biden Administration's Taiwan Strait Policy (*Bai Deng Zhengfu Taihai Zhengce Chu Jian Duanni*; 拜登政府台海政策初见端倪).” *World Knowledge (Shijie Zhichi; 世界知识)*. Mar. 10, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2yEJHavC-2peS5Q4MmF40A>.

⁴ Zou Zhibo, “The World Structure and Big Power Relations under the Sino-US Strategic Game (*Zhong Mei Zhanlüe Boyi Xia de Shijie Geju yu Daguo Guanxi*; 中美战略博弈下的世界格局与大国关系).” *China Strategic Watch (Zhongguo Zhanlüe GuanCha; 中国战略观察)*, no. 1-2 (2021), http://nigscass.cssn.cn/gjzzyj/202103/t20210322_5320750.html.

⁵ The theme of the US containing or isolating China is one of the most common themes in the dataset, occurring in 26 out of 67 articles (or about 39 percent). From January through March, this theme was associated with the Biden Administration in 13 of the 33 articles collected for this time period (39 percent). For examples, see: Yang Zejun, “The First Sign of the Biden Administration's Taiwan Strait Policy (*Bai Deng Zhengfu Taihai Zhengce Chu Jian Duanni*; 拜登政府台海政策初见端倪); “The Biden Effect.”

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