

# Is War with China Inevitable?

By [Mike Whitney](#)

Global Research, September 20, 2023

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

\*\*\*

*What changed in the US-China relationship that is pushing the two countries closer to war?*

*No one seems to know. Readers who follow developments in China closely, know that relations between the two superpowers have grown increasingly strained in the last few years. But while **the US has taken a more hostile approach to China, no one seems to know why**. Was there something in particular that China did that angered Washington leading to the imposition of economic sanctions, technology blockades and military provocations in the Taiwan Strait?*

*No, there's no indication that China did anything. What changed was Washington's approach to China. And—as you'll see—Washington's approach changed very quickly and very dramatically. **China went from friend to foe almost overnight**.*

*Here's why.*

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US maintained a policy of **engagement with China that accelerated its development and transformed the country into the main engine of global growth**. In December, 2001, China was granted "most-favored-nation"(MFN) status which was followed shortly after by its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). These developments allowed China to access western markets which turned China into a manufacturing center for US multinationals like Nike, Apple and Dell. China's opening also triggered a surge of foreign investment which pumped up growth while strengthening its financial assets and bond market. In short, **US policy laid the groundwork for the "Chinese miracle"** which set the stage for a great power conflict with the US.

**No other country in the world is more responsible for China's meteoric rise than the United States. Now, however, the foreign policy establishment has decided that it doesn't like its own creation.** It doesn't like the fact that China took advantage of the opportunities it was given to transform itself into a peer competitor of the United States. It doesn't like the fact that China's economy is growing more than twice as fast as America's

and is set to surpass the US within the decade. It doesn't like the fact that China is building a 21st century, state-of-the-art infrastructure grid that will economically integrate a large part of Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia into the world's biggest free trade zone. It doesn't like the fact that **China's expansive economic/political strategy will inevitably replace the "rules-based international order" with a Chinese-led system in which the renminbi is the world's reserve currency and China's financial markets are the largest and most liquid in the world.** America's foreign policy establishment is not happy about any of these developments especially since it is largely responsible for all of them.

Don't get me wrong; the Chinese are intelligent, resourceful, creative, and industrious people. And the Chinese Communist Party has played a critical role in lifting 800 million people out of poverty while steering the nation's economy towards unprecedented growth and prosperity.

But if China was not given access to western markets and entered into the WTO, there would be no Chinese miracle and no Chinese superpower today. Those opportunities were the result of widely-supported policies that were endorsed almost-universally by US foreign policy elites. So, if Washington now regrets having supported those policies, it can only blame itself. Here's some more background from foreign policy expert John Mearsheimer:

During the Cold War and under the policy of President Nixon, the U.S. decided to engage China and form a quasi-alliance with China against the Soviet Union. That made eminently good sense. And Nixon was correct to help the Chinese economy grow, for the more powerful China became, the more effective it was as a deterrent partner against the Soviet Union. However, once the Cold War ended in 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the U.S. no longer needed China to help contain the Soviet Union.

What **we foolishly did was pursue a policy of engagement, which was explicitly designed to help China grow more powerful economically.** Of course, as China grew economically, it translated that economic might into military might, and the U.S., as a consequence of this foolish policy of **engagement, helped to create a peer competitor.**

My bottom line is that the Nixon-Kissinger policy, from the early 1970s up until the late 1980s, made eminently good sense. But, after that, engagement was a colossal strategic blunder....

**The U.S. was not only expecting China to grow more powerful—it was purposely helping China to grow more powerful.** It was doing this based on the assumption that China would become a democracy over time and therefore would become a responsible stakeholder in an American-led international order.

Of course, that didn't happen. China did not become a democracy. And China, in effect, has set out to establish hegemony in Asia and challenge the U.S. around the planet. We now have a new Cold War." [U.S. engagement with China a 'strategic blunder': Mearsheimer](#), Nikkei

## Who you gonna call?

2

Countries which share greater trade\* with:

■ United States ■ China ■ No data

2000†



2020†



While I agree with most of what Mearsheimer says, I strongly disagree with the notion that US leaders were genuinely concerned about China becoming a democracy. Nor does democracy explain why US policy changed from mutually-beneficial engagement to open hostility. What Mearsheimer fails to acknowledge is that the **western economies are controlled by an oligarchy of elites who have been unable to make any significant inroads into the Chinese government's power-structure.** This is not because the Chinese government is ostensibly "communist", but because **Chinese leaders are strongly nationalistic and determined to maintain China's own sovereign independence against the onslaught of western elites.** In other words, **the emerging confrontation with China is a power-struggle between the WEF globalist cabal and Chinese nationalists.**

In any event, China is not responsible for the strained relations that exist today. The hostility and provocations are all coming from the United States which is trying to undo the damage it did by implementing policies that ran counter to its own national interests. In short, **the**

**Biden administration is trying to reverse 30 years of failed policy by doing an about-face and then blaming it on China.** It's a classic "bait and switch" operation. Here's more from Mearsheimer:

As time has shown, the engagement strategy was a failure. The Chinese economy has made an unprecedented leap forward, but the country has not transformed itself into a liberal democracy or "a responsible glass holder (a player interested in maintaining the current international order)." On the contrary, Chinese leaders see liberal values as a threat to their country's stability. And they, as the leaders of the rising powers usually do, have a tough foreign policy. **We must admit that economic involvement was a colossal strategic mistake.** Kurt Campbell and Eli Ratner – two former Obama administration officials who admitted that engagement had failed and those in the Biden administration today – write: **"Washington is now facing the most dynamic and formidable contender in modern history."** (U.S. engagement with China a 'strategic blunder': Mearsheimer, Nikkei)

The question that immediately arises is: If engagement was such "a colossal strategic mistake" then why did it take 30 years to figure it out? With a population that is 4 times the size of the US and GDP growing at roughly 9% for 2 decades, it should have been fairly obvious that China was going to be bigger and more powerful than the US in the not-too-distant future. And yet everyone in the political establishment pretended not to see what was right beneath their noses.

That's shocking. And what's even more shocking is the remedy our leaders have settled on to maintain their current advantage in the global order. **They intend to do everything in their power to sabotage China's economic development.** This aligns perfectly with Mearsheimer's observation that "the only opportunity that can change the dynamics is a dramatic crisis undermining China's unrelenting growth." And that explains what's going on today, **the Biden administration is making a concerted effort to target the vulnerable sectors of the Chinese economy and inflict as much damage as possible via sanctions, blockades and supplyline disruption.** We expect that this economic war on China will gradually intensify in the next few years along with new provocations in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea. If Mearsheimer's analysis is correct, then **we are still in the early rounds of a hybrid war that will undoubtedly drag on for years to come.**

So, when did it occur to our foreign policy geniuses that fueling China's growth might actually hurt US prospects for the future?



We don't know the specific date, but it looks like sometime around 2017 the elite consensus that supported engagement began to fall apart as more and more people became aware of the policy's shortcomings. Check out this comment by the Financial Times associate editor Martin Wolf who explains how quickly western elites turned against China:

I think what is happening is that western policymakers and above all, **American policymakers have decided that the rise of China is a major strategic threat.** And this has several dimensions. One of these is that the left of center has come to the view that "Well, they are never going to become a democracy as we thought they would, and that is problematic. We don't like that." But the bigger element—which is **the view of the strategic community and quite a large part of the corporate community—is that "These people (China) are a serious threat.** They have immense resources, the defense build up is quite substantial, and they getting are ahead technologically in some very important areas, and we are far too dependent upon them..... They see the interdependence on China as frightening, and **this paranoia has now become a dominant element in American thinking.... And it has shifted very quickly and very much across the board** in America although we are now seeing it in Europe as well. A paper was recently released by the German Industrial Confederation which basically said, "You know the Chinese technology policy; it's a threat to Germany." **This is a big change and it's happened quite recently."** [China: Friend or Foe?](#), You Tube, 12: 35 minute

So, according to Wolf, overall views on China among foreign policy elites changed very quickly and very dramatically. (Wolf's account is similar to many other elites who tell the same story.) **Engagement was increasingly seen as damaging to western interests,**

**and the search for a different approach began.** What Wolf fails to tell us is what it was that convinced foreign policy mandarins that China had become “major strategic threat”? Was it due to the CCP’s increasingly activist oversight of foreign corporations or the Communist Party’s refusal to implement reforms of their massive State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) or did it have something to do with China’s impressive strides in advanced technology that put the future of AI and supercomputing up-for-grabs?

What was it?

While we can’t answer that question with 100% certainty, we can make an educated guess.



In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping launched his signature infrastructure program called the Belt and Road Initiative, which is a vast, multi-continent development strategy that is the most expensive and expansive infrastructure program of all time. The BRI has already garnered commitments from more than 150 nations representing 75% of the global population. The stated goal of the project is “to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future.” In fact, the project does all of that and much more. The BRI will improve ports, skyscrapers, railroads, roads, bridges, airports, dams, coal-fired power stations, and railroad tunnels. **It will create a vast spiderweb of cutting-edge high-speed rail that will lower the cost of shipping while boosting the profits of manufacturers and wholesalers. The BRI projects a vision of a fully-integrated 21st century world in which Beijing lies at the very epicenter of global commerce.** This is why the US and its allies—who are the staunch defenders of an archaic, extractive model of neoliberal capitalism—are prepared to do whatever-it-takes to derail China’s development and prevent this futuristic plan from going forward. Here’s how Sir Malcolm Rifkind, politician and former cabinet minister, summed up the significance of the BRI in a recent discussion of China on YouTube:

“I think if we’re going to look years ahead, I think **the most important thing is the potential relevance of the Belt and Road Initiative to the relationship of Europe and China.** For a thousand years, Europe and China have had to have contact with each other through the sea lanes. That huge central Asian landmass was, like the Atlantic Ocean- a barrier. What is happening now; and if we look 5, 10, 15 years

ahead—already freight trains are going from China to western Europe in increasing numbers in both directions. So, **what that means is, Europe and China could be looking directly at each other in a way that Europe and North America were able to do because of air travel and because the Atlantic became a bridge.** That would be a historic change regardless of the politics China and Europe looking directly at each other and trading with each other in that way. That would have massive implications.” [China: Friend or Foe?](#) You Tube, 1:21:10 min

Rifkind is right. **The opening of transit corridors and freight lines between China and Europe are “the most important thing” because they draw the continents closer together into a giant free trade zone which will inevitably increase their mutual power and prosperity while leaving the US on the outside looking in.** This is why the Biden administration is so determined to make sure the BRI does not become a reality. Keep in mind, the primary foreign policy objective of the United States is **“to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.”** The vast expansion of China’s Belt and Road across the Eurasian landmass and linking European capitals to Beijing and Shanghai, definitely fit that description and qualify China as Washington’s mortal enemy.

China’s leaders still believe that they can reach an accommodation with Washington that will help to avoid a direct confrontation. But Washington’s red lines have already been crossed and there’s bound to be trouble ahead.

\*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*This article was originally published on [The Unz Review](#).*

*Michael Whitney is a renowned geopolitical and social analyst based in Washington State. He initiated his career as an independent citizen-journalist in 2002 with a commitment to honest journalism, social justice and World peace.*

*He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).*

*Featured image is from TUR*

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Mike Whitney](#), Global Research, 2023

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Mike Whitney](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)