
China

- ✓ **Can the U.S. risk further escalating tensions in the South China Sea?**
- ✓ **Does China's possession of U.S. debt safeguard the country from sanctions if it fails to act in accordance with political agreements?**
- ✓ **When the U.S. arms other Asian nations, does this strengthen or weaken its negotiating stance with regard to China?**

Facts

Population: 1.368 billion (2015 est.).

GDP: 10.98 trillion (2015 est.).

Leaders: Xi Jinping, 63, general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and president of China; Li Keqiang, 61, premier of China.

Important Dates.

1949: The People's Republic of China is established.

1950: China enters the Korean War by supplying troops and arms to North Korea.

1966–76: The Chinese Cultural Revolution is launched under Communist leader Mao Zedong.

1972: U.S. President Richard Nixon visits China.

1979: The U.S. and China normalize relations.

Foreign Relations.

The Chinese government under Xi Jinping is focused on expanding global influence. China has built strong relations with North Korea, and with other East Asian neighbors. China has also begun expanding its influence outside of Asia by building relationships with African and Latin American countries. While the relationship between the U.S. and China has improved during the Obama administration, there remain areas of distrust, particularly as concern freedom of navigation through the South China Sea and cybersecurity. China's refusal to recognize a recent decision by an international tribunal in The Hague adds to concerns about the country's cooperation in the current international order. The tribunal rejected Chinese claims to sovereignty in the South China Sea.

Current U.S. Policy

Security and the South China Sea.

China's military buildup in the South China Sea is one of the greatest sources of contention in U.S. relations with the country. China and several of its neighbors dispute island territory there. The main policy focus for the U.S. in this area is to protect freedom of navigation laws for trade and commerce among nations. The U.S. has sent naval vessels to patrol the waters around several islands newly constructed and militarized by the Chinese. The U.S. also opened up arms trading with many of China's neighbors. President Obama recently lifted the embargo on arms with Vietnam, and also increased the U.S. military presence in Taiwan and the Philippines. The U.S. argues that these policies are not meant to intensify hostilities in an already volatile area. But such actions do represent an effort to mitigate China's increased regional sphere of influence.

China-U.S. Trade Policy.

China was omitted from negotiations surrounding, and entry into, the ambitious Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade agreement that would link the U.S. and several countries bordering the Pacific Ocean. Many experts see the partnership as a way for the U.S. to nullify some of China's influence in the economies of the Asia-Pacific region. "We can't let countries like China write the rules of the global economy," President Obama said in a statement on the deal. While these policies seem to point toward a move away from trade with China, the country remains the U.S.' second largest trading partner and its biggest source of imports. A bilateral investment treaty that would ease market access for investors in both countries is also under negotiation.

New Model of Great Power Relations.

Chinese President Xi has made several public calls for negotiations between his government and the U.S. with the aim of improving relations. This so-called "new model" involves agreements in multiple areas of policy, including climate control, counterterrorism and cybersecurity. The climate agreement reached in 2014 between China and the U.S.—the two largest emitters of greenhouse gases—was an important step, with both countries pledging to begin cutting emissions by 2030.

The U.S. and China also share information and resources on counterterrorism. They have met to discuss cybersecurity, and agreed to anti-hacking principles in the wake of Chinese cyberattacks targeting U.S. commercial secrets. Both countries affirm that government support of cyberattacks will be met with heavy sanctions.

Candidate Positions



Hillary Clinton is critical of China’s human rights record and its actions in the South China Sea. She pledges to crack down on trade and currency violations by the country. As secretary of state, she was the face of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” which China received as an attempt to mitigate its regional influence. During this time, then-Secretary Clinton elicited a strong negative response from the Chinese when she called the South China Sea dispute a matter of U.S. “national interest” and “pivotal to regional security.” While serving in the Obama administration, she was openly critical of China’s human rights record, especially treatment of activists and dissidents. As first lady, she delivered an address at the United Nations Fourth World Congress on Women in Beijing: “Human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights,” she said, condemning certain Chinese practices.



Donald Trump has made China—more specifically, trade with China—a central issue of his campaign. Mr. Trump outlines a policy for U.S.-China trade relations that involves immediately declaring China a currency manipulator; forcing China to recognize U.S. intellectual property; promoting American manufacturing jobs; and strengthening the U.S. negotiating position by lowering the U.S. corporate tax rate, reducing debt and increasing U.S. military presence in the East and South China Seas. He has also spoken of imposing a 45% tariff on Chinese imports. “A strong and smart America is an America that will find a better friend in China,” he said in his “America First” foreign policy speech. He added that Obama administration weakness had resulted in a loss of respect for the U.S. and more belligerent behavior by China.

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