

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 27-04-2020	2. REPORT TYPE Master of Military Studies (MMS) thesis	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AY 2019-2020
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4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE China's Core Interests and Strategic Culture: Implications for U.S. Policy in Hong	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A
	5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A

6. AUTHOR(S) Gulliksen, Andrea N. (Major)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A
	5e. TASK NUMBER N/A
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A
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9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Hong Kong has experienced a marked decline in democracy over the past 10 years. The U.S. has been pitted between supporting Hong Kong's democratization while acknowledging Hong Kong is part of China. In 2019, U.S. Congress passed new legislation to support Hong Kong's autonomy and improve the human rights by conditioning an annual assessment of Hong Kong's MFN trade status. Thirty years after Tiananmen, what has caused the sudden shift in U.S. policy? Does it make sense politically and strategically for the U.S. to use economic sanctions to shape China's behavior? The U.S. has expressed support for Hong Kong's unique form of government since it's return to China in 1997 but has repeatedly failed to adopt a strategy that supports this objective. In recent years the U.S. has demonstrated a willingness to take a hard stance to China, prioritizing competition over cooperation. The U.S. needs to reconsider the maximalist coercive strategy with China without considering China's core interests and national strategy. This will lead to maximum failure.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Hong Kong, Protests, China, Core Interest, Strategic Culture, U.S. Policy, Sanctions

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	37	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**CHINA'S CORE INTERESTS AND STRATEGIC CULTURE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY IN HONG KONG**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Major Andrea N. Gulliksen

AY 2019-2020

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Christopher Yung.

Approved: //signed//

Date: 27 April 2020

Oral Defense Committee Member: LTC Paul Armstrong

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Executive Summary

Title: China's Core Interests and Strategic Culture: Implications for U.S. Policy in Hong Kong

Author: Major Andrea N. Gulliksen

Thesis: The U.S. needs to modify its primacy mindset, reassess its unilateral approach and the ineffective threat of harsh economic sanctions against Hong Kong, and develop a long-term coexistence strategy with China that sustains U.S. national interests and credibility as an international leader. To this end, U.S.-China policy should be adapted to improve alliances, reinvest in and leverage multilateral institutions, increase diplomacy and include multilateral incremental measures to prevent further deterioration of Hong Kong's democracy and civil rights.

Discussion: Hong Kong has experienced a marked decline in democracy over the past 10 years. The escalating violence, dissension, and crackdown in Hong Kong can't be viewed in isolation. Beijing's policies and response must balance the assertion of sovereignty while preserving the Basic Law and Hong Kong's good image. The Chinese also have the dilemma of being under a microscope, since Hong Kong represents the manifestation of One Country, Two Systems policy and Taiwan's citizens will be watching how China manages Hong Kong to determine if China could be trusted to manage Taiwan adequately. The U.S. has been pitted between supporting Hong Kong's democratization while acknowledging Hong Kong is part of China. On 20 November 2019, the U.S. Congress passed new legislation to support Hong Kong's autonomy and improve the human rights by conditioning an annual assessment of Hong Kong's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status. Thirty years after Tiananmen, what has caused the sudden shift in U.S. policy? Does it make sense politically and strategically for the U.S. to use economic sanctions to shape China's behavior?

Conclusion: The U.S. has expressed support for Hong Kong's unique form of government since it's return to China in 1997 but has repeatedly failed to adopt a strategy that supports this objective. For the last 30 years following the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy was framed by a unipolar world. Today, U.S. hegemony is fading as it repeatedly takes actions that undermine, dismiss, and devalue the role of alliances, international organizations and mechanisms that establish international norms, rules, and laws which serve as the framework for predictability and global security. Interestingly, while the PRC has taken actions through the government of Hong Kong that have deteriorated Hong Kong's autonomy, it has not violated any legal agreements. Over the last one-hundred years, international sanctions have rarely been effective in achieving the stated goal and are unlikely to change China's behavior. The U.S. needs to invest in better understanding the countries whose actions they're trying to influence. It's not just about projecting strength. The U.S. must adapt its primacy mindset, seeking maximalist coercive concessions through maximum coercive pressure without considering China's unique strategic culture and core interests. This makes sanctions counter-productive and the cost of implementing the sanctions may be too high. This will lead to maximum failure. The U.S. needs to adapt a more cooperative negotiating strategy with China that considers China's core interests and weighs policy options against what allies will support while balancing long-term U.S.-China relations.

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Preface

After learning about the (1648) Treaty of Westphalia and studying threats to sovereignty, I became interested in the growing unrest in Hong Kong and the dilemma it presented to both the U.S. and China's foreign policy. There's much debate over the growing threat posed from a rising China. As I began exploring the subject, I found most of what was printed in the media was often limited to the American perspective, which placed increasing pressure on the U.S. to take a hard stand against China and to punish Beijing for the unrest in Hong Kong. Initially, having little knowledge on the subject, I too took this stance with my thesis. As I began my research, legislation was passed which did exactly this, but by punishing Hong Kong for the decisions made in Beijing. I began to wonder if this was really the right decision and this line of thinking turned my thesis upside down. To inform U.S. policy decisions, I needed to increase my understanding of the factors contributing to the unrest from the perspective of the Hong Kong citizens and identify what authorities (treaties, laws, judicial policies) existed to support the protestors demands. This highlighted the significant role China has in determining the long-term fate of Hong Kong. My research included China's view and the anticipated response to the unrest based on China's strategic culture, core interests, national strategy, and internal defense policy. Lastly, my aim was to explore previous U.S.-China strategy in Hong Kong and the implications of the current policy to identify limitations and develop policy recommendations.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Christopher Yung for the academic freedom to research, pursue knowledge and come to my own conclusions without restrictions or pressure to embrace any particular ideals. I'm honored to have had the opportunity to work with such a renowned scholar on China and an extremely skilled educator. Dr. Yung, thank you for your confidence, wisdom, and for investing your time and talents in me. You helped me grow tremendously. I also want to thank LTC Paul Armstrong for his unwavering positivity, commitment and leadership. We were truly blessed to have you as our advisor. You set the conditions that forged an unbreakable bond within our conference group and enabled our success throughout the year.

Rising dissatisfaction in Hong Kong has sparked protest and mass demonstration on an unprecedented scale in response to civil rights violations and deterioration of local democracy.¹² The protests began in March 2019 following the introduction of a controversial extradition bill, which allowed the extradition of Hong Kong residents and visitors to mainland China for trial³ where the conviction rate is 99.9%⁴, causing concern over Hong Kong's autonomy. The refusal to withdraw the bill expanded protestors frustrations and led to increased clashes with the police. Of these demands, the withdrawal of the bill has been the only concession by Beijing.⁵ "As a result, some activists are undertaking more assertive forms of civil disobedience, including occupying the international airport and blocking major traffic thoroughfares."⁶ The zealous acts of protestors have been met with perceived disproportionate use of force by the Hong Kong Police and alleged targeted violence by triad gangs.⁷⁸

Hong Kong has experienced a marked decline in democracy over the past 10 years.⁹ The escalating violence, dissension, and crackdown in Hong Kong can't be viewed in isolation. To understand a dissonance movement, one must understand where the power lies. Beijing's policies and response must balance the assertion of sovereignty while preserving the Basic Law and Hong Kong's good image. The Chinese also have the dilemma of being under a microscope, since Hong Kong represents the manifestation of One Country, Two Systems policy and Taiwan's citizens will be watching how China manages Hong Kong to determine if China could be trusted to manage Taiwan adequately. The United States (U.S.) has been pitted between supporting Hong Kong's democratization while acknowledging Hong Kong is part of China. On 20 November 2019, the U.S. Congress passed new legislation to support Hong Kong's autonomy and improve the human rights by conditioning an annual assessment of Hong Kong's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status.¹⁰

Thirty years after Tiananmen, what has caused the sudden shift in U.S. policy? Does it make sense politically and strategically for the U.S. to use economic sanctions to shape China's behavior? Sanctions have the ability to create devastating effects and, under the right conditions, can be powerful in coercing a state's behavior. The U.S. desire to exert economic coercion against China "to extract maximalist concessions" mirror the "maximum pressure" strategy adopted toward Iran, North Korea and Venezuela.¹¹ Sanctions have become the U.S. "go-to" policy tool of choice in the post-Cold War period when it comes to China (or some other perceived bad actor) and the failure to consider target countries core interests and strategy can make sanctions counterproductive.

The U.S. needs to modify its primacy mindset, reassess its unilateral approach and the ineffective threat of harsh economic sanctions against Hong Kong, and develop a long-term coexistence strategy with China that sustains U.S. national interests and credibility as an international leader. To this end, U.S.-China policy should be adapted to improve alliances, reinvest in and leverage multilateral institutions, increase diplomacy and include multilateral incremental measures to prevent further deterioration of Hong Kong's democracy and civil rights.

First, this paper explores factors contributing to the erosion of democracy in Hong Kong; second, it identifies China's internal defense policy; third, it examines the application and effectiveness of economic sanctions; fourth, it considers China's strategy and most likely response to the continued unrest in Hong Kong, and lastly, it provides U.S. policy recommendations.

Deterioration of Democracy and Freedoms

Between May 2018 and March 2019, a Congressional Executive Committee on China found “accelerating negative trends” in the deterioration of civil rights in Hong Kong.¹² The report documented the mainland government’s active monitoring of various individuals and groups critical of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) policies. A decreased tolerance for threats to Chinese sovereignty was identified through the mainland’s establishment of “red lines” to silence all pro-independence. The report stated that:

In some particularly concerning instances, Hong Kong authorities took actions aligned with mainland priorities at the expense of human rights and fundamental freedoms. There were particular setbacks in democratic electoral processes, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.¹³

For example, the new ordinance cites national security to justify a ban against the Hong Kong National Party; a pro-independence political party. Hong Kong also screened and blocked candidates from running in local elections based on political views. Six pro-independence candidates elected to the legislative council were disqualified and barred from office following the National People’s Congress (NPC) interpretation of the basic law for insincere oaths.¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶ In addition to limiting political discourse, several decisions were made to limit access to Hong Kong by individuals publicly critical of the CCP; such as Kenichiro Wada, a Japanese politician who expressed support for Taiwan’s independence; Victor Mallet, a British financial news editor, was unable to renew his work visa after hosting a talk advocating Hong Kong’s independence and was subsequently denied access as a tourist; and the U.S. Navy was denied a port call in October 2018.¹⁷ China has since suspended comprehensive port access by the U.S. Navy in response to U.S. legislation in support of Hong Kong’s human rights and democracy.¹⁸

In January 2019, new laws further restricted freedom of expression, criminalizing flag desecration and any public insult to the national anthem. Growing investment is noted in businesses and organizations that possess the ability to influence public opinion. The report also found increased censorship in the media, as a “significant number of media outlets are now owned by companies with business interests on the mainland or whose major shareholders are members of the CCP.”¹⁹ Ownership of half of the bookstores have been indirectly tied to the mainland central government and do not sell “politically sensitive” books.²⁰ In 2015, four men, associated with a bookstore that published and sold material critical to the CCP all disappeared on the same day and later mysteriously reappeared, amid speculation of abduction on the mainland for trial.²¹²²

Legal Framework

The Hong Kong protests have centered on five demands - the withdrawal of the bill, investigation into alleged police brutality and misconduct, release of arrested protestors, a complete retraction of the official characterization of the protests as riots, the Chief Executive’s resignation and universal suffrage for the election of the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive.²³ Is there a legal framework to support these demands? Hong Kong’s legal system is based on British common law, “but the final court of appeal is now located in Hong Kong itself instead of at the Privy Council in London (although the power of final interpretation of legislation is vested in the NPC Standing Committee in Beijing).”²⁴

The 1984 agreement for Hong Kong’s return to China on 1 July 1997 was formalized by the Sino-British Joint Declaration, in which Hong Kong would retain a “high degree of autonomy,” maintain the existing legal and judicial policies, and the basic policies regarding Hong Kong “will remain unchanged for 50 years.”²⁵ These basic policies were developed

between China and Hong Kong and defined under the Basic Law, which serves as Hong Kong's "mini-constitution" and preserves these rights and freedoms until 2047.²⁶ The Basic Law gives authority to the Hong Kong People for administering Hong Kong, to include maintenance of public order but with the exception of defense and foreign affairs. Under the Basic Law, Hong Kong retains independent judicial power and citizens maintain the rights of "freedom of speech, of the press and of publication; freedom of association, of assembly, of procession, of demonstration, communication, and religious freedom."²⁷ Politically, the ultimate aim is the election of the Legislative Council and Chief Executive by universal suffrage.²⁸

Protest over dissatisfaction with the democratic electoral processes has been a persistent theme.

(W)hen Chinese leaders insisted candidates would have to be 'selected' by a committee made up of Beijing supporters...(similar to an) Iranian-style democracy, where only the Mullah's decide - hundreds of thousands of people began to take to the streets of Hong Kong to march in protest during the 2014 Umbrella Movement.²⁹

"In the colonial era, the most senior leader was the 'governor,' who was appointed by London without any consultation with the people of Hong Kong."³⁰ China introduced the opportunity of a limited democracy through the Basic Law with the potential of electing their own leader; however, Hong Kong citizens have yet to realize universal suffrage of the Chief Executive. The current protests in Hong Kong began in response to the perceived recent infringement and to preserve rights guaranteed under the Basic Law but have grown to demand a full democracy.³¹ Under the Basic Law, the Chief Executive is "selected by election or through consultations locally and be appointed" by the Central People's Government (CPG).³² Legally, China retains the authority for determining when and if universal suffrage will be granted.

China's Internal Defense Policy

Analyzing the legal framework and factors contributing to the erosion of civil rights increase understanding of the dissonance movement and highlight the significant role China plays in determining the long-term fate of Hong Kong. To help explain whither Hong Kong in the short-term, one must query China's view of the unrest and China's response based on internal defense policy.

The scope and frequency of mass incidents in China have grown significantly; from 8700 in 1993, 87,000 in 2005, and 180,000 mass incidents in 2010 - posing a growing threat to China's internal security and by extension, regime survival.³³ China's grand strategy is based on three core interests; preserving the CCP and internal security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and economic and social development.³⁴³⁵ Hong Kong is not an independent country; rather, a Special Administrative Region under Chinese Sovereignty. Beijing views both the internal security within Hong Kong and the associated unrest as a threat to the CCP as core interests. China has signaled its resolve over its core interests through the creation of "red lines,"³⁶ emphasizing it "will never give up its legitimate rights and interests."³⁷

The continuing protests and escalating violence in Hong Kong sparked fear for the potential of a violent crackdown, reminiscent of the actions to smother the 1989 pro-democracy movement at Tiananmen Square which resulted in the massacre of 10,000 people.³⁸ The fallout from Tiananmen served as a catalyst driving changes to China's internal defense policies.³⁹ Preserving order is the ultimate objective but must be balanced with protecting party legitimacy. To this end, the 2008 Regulations on Handling Mass Incidents and 2009 People's Armed Police Law identifies police as the primary response force for internal defense,⁴⁰ while limiting the use of People's Liberation Army (PLA) to extremis situations, as a last resort should the People's

Armed Police (PAP) be unable to resolve the incident.⁴¹⁴² It also placed greater controls over the deployment of police and the police' use of force.⁴³

Clearly, China has demonstrated a willingness to use whatever force necessary to protect its core interests;⁴⁴ however, the use of force is not completely unregulated but does vary starkly from western democratic societies. Chinese use of force isn't limited by legal restrictions or exercised to "defend or retaliate."⁴⁵ Rather, in Chinese culture force is used to coerce or compel a desired action with the metric of appropriateness being the effectiveness in achieving the desired action or endstate.⁴⁶ With that said, China's use of force is still guided by a force continuum.⁴⁷ Initially, the least amount of force, such as officer presence and verbal commands would be used to disperse crowds. Escalation of force might include soft empty hand or hard empty hand techniques (that do not involve weapons), less-than-lethal force (pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets or bean bags; e.g.), arrest of protest leaders, informal methods - such as the use of triad groups, and up to and including deadly force. Ultimately, the management of security incidents are highly centralized by local government and party officials with strict controls over the approval for security and police response and their actions to restore order.⁴⁸ To that end, government leaders have an imperative to determine the perceived motivations and associated threats presented by a mass incident, such as a protest in order to maintain security and stability.

MFN Status and MFN Approval

Examining Hong Kong's legal framework, China's core interests, and internal defense policies are critical to informing U.S. policy options for supporting Hong Kong's civil rights. Over the last 70-years, the U.S. has overlooked these factors and developed an overreliance on economic statecraft tied to withholding or granting conditioned or permanent MFN status but has been unsuccessful in shaping Chinese behavior.

During the Korean War, the Trade Act of 1951 suspended trade with all Non-Market Economies (NME), which included China, the Soviet Union, and countries comprising the Soviet-Sino bloc. In 1980, U.S. trade was conditionally restored with China under the Jackson-Vanik amendment of the 1974 Trade Act. This allowed the U.S. to temporarily grant China MFN status, requiring annual renewal by Congress. Permanent MFN or Permanent Normal Trade Relations could only be granted if countries met certain human rights criteria, such as freedom of emigration.⁴⁹ MFN is used to describe favorable treatment afforded to another state in international trade. MFN status allows a country to receive the lowest tariffs and fewest trade barriers.

The U.S. Congress attempted to pass legislation on two occasions to further restrict China's MFN status but was unsuccessful. The first was in response to the massacre at Tiananmen Square. Both houses of Congress passed legislation in 1991 and 1992 to disapprove China's MFN status but were vetoed by President H.W. Bush. "The primary focus of the debate during these years, however, was not whether to deny MFN status for China altogether, but whether to place new human rights conditions on China's MFN eligibility."⁵⁰ This occurred at the height of Soviet concern and economic integration was the center of the U.S.-China engagement strategy. The second attempt was initiated by Clinton in his presidential campaign against President H.W. Bush, who criticized him for kowtowing to China. As a campaign pledge, presidential candidate Bill Clinton vowed to right the wrong of President H.W. Bush and condition China's MFN status by linking human rights to trade. After winning the election, in 1993 President Clinton's threats to revoke China's MFN did not have success in influencing China's human rights record. A year later, President Clinton would renege on his promise, falling prey to the "anxieties of the American business community" based on the symbiotic trade

relationship with China.⁵¹ Despite China's lack of progress in human rights, and in a complete reversal, legislation was approved to grant China 'Permanent' MFN status.⁵²⁵³⁵⁴

Throughout history, the U.S. has overestimated its ability to influence China's actions.⁵⁵ In the 1970s, President Nixon took a giant leap in shifting from an antagonist policy to one of rapprochement with China. The goal was to leverage the power of U.S. hegemony to deepen the gap between the fractured Sino-Soviet relations by strengthening U.S. influence with China; and over time, mold China to become more like the U.S. and into a responsible stakeholder within the international system.⁵⁶⁵⁷ In 2000, the continuation of the rapprochement strategy granted China entrance to the WTO under the same precepts, thereby suppressing the U.S. will to confront or upset relations with China.⁵⁸ The terms of this experiment haven't proved successful. While it has opened China's market and supported limited reforms, it has also allowed China to exert tighter controls, sustain human rights abuses, conduct unfair trade practices, place obstacles to market access, and adapt predatory economics to sustain power. Domestically, China has increased control within the state through the social credit system, mass surveillance, mass incarceration, censorship, and media manipulation.⁵⁹⁶⁰⁶¹ At the outset of China's permanent MFN status, the U.S.-China trade deficit was \$84 billion. In 2017, it has increased over fourfold to \$373 billion.⁶² In November of 2019, the deficit has risen to \$419 billion.⁶³

U.S. Policy - Economic Sanctions in Hong Kong

Is the third time a charm? The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019 creates the framework to assess and condition Hong Kong's MFN trade status by linking Hong Kong's autonomy and human rights record.⁶⁴ Thus, providing a new mechanism to apply pressure to China and demonstrating a newfound political unity and will.⁶⁵

What has changed? During the 1980s-1990, China's strategy was based on Deng Xiaoping's maxim "Tao Guang Yang Hui", which translates to bide your time, keep a low profile, and hide your strengths from others.⁶⁶ China mastered this strategy under the auspice of China's Peaceful Rise; however, China's strategy appears to have changed. It's not just China's economic growth that has gained increased attention. Over the last 12 years, the U.S. began to identify indications and warnings of inconsistencies in China's behavior against its stated goal. China's military investments increased 15% annually each year between 1990 to 2007, supporting military professionalization and a build-up of military equipment deemed incongruent with a peaceful rise. In 2008 U.S.-China interdependence increased in the face of the financial crisis but growing concerns arose based on the economic imbalances. China became the largest foreign creditor and held the largest percentage of U.S. debt (\$600 billion).⁶⁷ In 2010, China became the second largest economy, predicted to take over the U.S. in 2027.⁶⁸ This rise didn't occur by accident or through a covert agenda. China's 2025 Industrial Plan outlined the intentions to gain a decisive industrial advantage over the U.S. Xi Jinping has also overtly expressed that China is in an apparent war with the U.S and has made his aspirations for regional dominance known in the media⁶⁹⁷⁰ In 2015, China's controversial expansion of sovereign claims in the South China Sea and militarization in the region sparked new fears of a growing threat to regional stability.⁷¹ China's expansion of aid, export of 5G networks, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are additional indicators of China's regional and global ambitions.⁷²⁷³⁷⁴⁷⁵

The U.S. thought it had solved the China problem through a persistent engagement strategy, permanent, unconditioned MFN trading status, and induction into the WTO. Through a crescendo of cumulating events, evidenced through China's revisionist behavior, Washington has begun to change strategy to confront the rising threat of China.⁷⁶ The U.S. needs a new

mechanism to apply pressure to influence the threat of China to U.S. national interests and national security. The Trump administration seems willing to take a tougher approach to China. For example, Vice President Mike Pence says “the United States will prioritize competition over cooperation by using tariffs to combat economic aggression.”⁷⁷ There is also evidence of bipartisan Congressional support for a tougher U.S. policy on China.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, have largely supported Mr. Trump’s approach to China, especially on tariffs. In May, for instance, Mr. Schumer urged the president to ‘hang tough,’ saying, ‘Strength is the only way to win with China.’⁷⁸

Sanction Implications

Generally, sanctions are not an effective tool and fail to achieve the stated purpose most of the time. In the book “Economic Sanctions Reconsidered,” Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Scott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott explored the intended purpose and effectiveness of sanctions between 1914 and 2008. In sum, international sanctions were levied in 200 instances, of which only 13 incidents achieved the intended purpose and “sanctions themselves were instrumental to achieving that goal.”⁷⁹ In the decision calculus to assess sanction effectiveness, both the target and sender countries’ norms and values play a key role. Failure to account for these differences can negate sanction effectiveness, as evidenced by the U.S. unsuccessful MFN related sanctions to China post 1989 Tiananmen due to the U.S. mirror-image-fallacy.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the U.S. aim was to improve China’s human rights, but it had an opposite effect. Fundamentally, U.S. and China have very different ideologies, values and beliefs which shape the respective norms and behavior. China has a complex culture which spans over four millennia, encompassing aspects of Confucianism, Taoism, communism which shapes China’s foreign policy and informs how

it's likely to respond to sanctions.⁸¹ These philosophies shape China's preference for conflict avoidance, seeking persuasion over coercion. From the outset, the U.S. placed China's human rights at the center of a public conflict, demanding China improve human rights based on a non-Confucian definition or lose MFN. For China, this was insulting and humiliating.⁸² China views itself as a great power and doesn't want to be lectured by a foreign power; nor will China kowtow to foreign pressure.

Sanction efficacy with China faces additional challenges outside of the historical trends and cultural considerations described above. Authorities must exist to provide an expedient to sanction an actor. The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, while demonstrating support for U.S. values, undermines international rules and norms - the system the U.S. created. At the outset of the Great Depression, the U.S. led international talks to establish rules to regulate international trade, which resulted in the creation of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948. GATT was a legal agreement between countries designed to open markets, reduce trade barriers and support economic recovery. GATT established rules for managing trade conflict, which created more predictability and prevented government interference and escalation. During the 1970s, adherence to trade rules declined and the U.S. pushed for a stronger system, which resulted in the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁸³ GATT requires all WTO members to extend MFN status unconditionally and without prejudice to all members.⁸⁴ The international framework provides mechanisms for both countries to pursue national interests. China could dispute the U.S. sanctions through the WTO. The dispute settlement could result in "an adverse WTO ruling (which) would merely allow China to impose equivalent sanctions on the (U.S.)."⁸⁵ We have seen reciprocal tit-for-tat tariffs play out over the last two years in the U.S.-China trade war with little gain for either country.⁸⁶ Under Section 232

of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the U.S. could sidestep China's WTO dispute settlement by asserting grounds of national security but this would be a reach and difficult to justify.⁸⁷ If the U.S. can't play by its own rules, it creates a slippery slope for other countries to disregard rules when it doesn't suit them.

New U.S. sanctions will find it hard to change Chinese actions toward Hong Kong. The U.S. approach of unilateral sanctions decreases the legitimacy of the threat and/or actual punishment. China's interconnected global economy may pose a barrier to generating multi-lateral support. China's economy is highly diversified and more resilient than the Russia or Iran, which decreases the effectiveness of sanctions.⁸⁸ China has extensively studied the USSR collapse and published lessons learned from the U.S.-USSR economic war during the Cold War. In summary, China gleaned that the U.S. lacked strength and resolve and U.S. policy was riddled with "compromises and contradictions."⁸⁹ China also noted the USSR didn't apply economic counterattack measures;⁹⁰ whereas, China would respond in kind which could hurt U.S. businesses. China could become less cooperative to supporting U.S. interests and those of our allies. U.S. China's response to perceived threats to the CCP could be highly escalatory.⁹¹ China's escalation could include asymmetrical measures that seek to eliminate U.S. influence in Asia and "undermine U.S. centrality in the global economic system, such as efforts to undermine confidence in the U.S. financial system."⁹² If U.S. sanctions are unlikely to change Chinese behavior and more likely to escalate it, what happens if China calls the U.S.' bluff? Is the U.S. prepared to escalate in kind and to what extent? U.S. sanctions are based on U.S. values and the threat may have withstood China's initial retaliatory measures,⁹³ but the cost may be too high for the U.S. to fully implement the sanctions. China has indicated Hong Kong is a core interest and is willing to go to war to prevent foreign interference. The U.S. recognizes Hong Kong is a

SAR of China and must maintain a long-term relationship with China. Imposing the new sanctions outlined in the 2019 Hong Kong Democracy and Human Rights Act are likely to result in a total breakdown of U.S.-China relations. Ultimately, this will cause the U.S. to reassess sanctions, as Hong Kong is not vital to U.S. national security.

Future Implications for Hong Kong

Under Xi Jinping's rule China can be expected to more aggressively pursue its core interests and less willing to accept a subordinate role in the U.S.-led international order, particularly within Southeast Asia. China will maintain a robust information campaign to shape both domestic and international audiences and reiterate its sovereign right to take measures to exert control and maintain stability.⁹⁴ Economically, China will do what it must to secure Hong Kong as a core interest while balancing autonomy to prevent destabilization. Hong Kong is China's largest trade partner and the largest source of foreign direct investment.⁹⁵ The unrest in Hong Kong has contributed to the slowing of the economy but is narrowly balancing the confidence of markets, businesses, and foreign investors.⁹⁶ Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index remains largely unimpacted, with stocks slightly up from the start of 2019. "Hong Kong also looks set to retain its position as the top market for new stock listings globally."⁹⁸

While the PRC has taken actions through the government of Hong Kong that have deteriorated Hong Kong's autonomy, it has not violated any legal agreements. Ultimately, China will determine the outcome to the protestors demands. The concession to withdraw the bill is a huge win to maintain the autonomy of Hong Kong's legal system but further concessions are unlikely. China will continue to exercise the role of high court and veto power over Hong Kong to shape laws, amendments and legal decisions to exert control and slow pro-democracy efforts; thereby enabling China to uphold the Joint Declaration through 2047 and possibly beyond. This

allows China to fuel nationalism, demonstrate reliability, and increase credibility within the international community. Additionally, it also increases international recognition of China's sovereignty and strengthens the potential of international support against any unlawful foreign intervention. The constrained actions to decrease democracy in Hong Kong serves as a lynchpin for China's national policy to achieve its core interests, namely the ultimate unification of China under the control of the CCP.

Beijing's management of the democracy movement in Hong Kong demonstrates a marked shift in policy from the harsh crack down of dissent in Tiananmen to a so far limited use of force against dissent in Hong Kong. The perceived Chinese interference in Hong Kong's governance and restriction of freedoms has proven detrimental in marketing the One Country, Two Systems model.⁹⁹ This is evidenced through the 2019 elections in Taiwan.¹⁰⁰

U.S. Policy Recommendations

For the last 30 years following the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy has been framed by a unipolar world. Today, U.S. hegemony is fading as it faces a rising China. "In the past generation, (China's) GDP has soared: from 20 percent of the U.S. level in 1991 to 120 percent today (measured by purchasing power parity (PPP), the metric that both the CIA and International Monetary Fund (IMF) use to compare national economies)."¹⁰¹ While China's GDP has grown exponentially relative to the U.S., "the U.S. share of global GDP – nearly one-half in 1950 – has gone from one-quarter in 1991 to one-seventh today."¹⁰²

Despite the decrease in U.S. relative economic power, U.S. arrogance in global supremacy has persisted. In the absence of a great power competition, the U.S. has been isolated from the consequences of a primacy based foreign policy, but as U.S. power wanes, the costs are rising to sustain this mindset.¹⁰³ The U.S. has recanted support for partnerships and international

agreements which has fractured relationships with allies, diminished U.S. influence, and removed a significant source of global support to counter rising adversaries. The U.S. is used to getting what it wants; but it must adapt its policy and balance primacy with restraint. U.S. policy can't disregard the strategic culture and core interests of China. The U.S. needs to adapt a more cooperative strategy, or at least a negotiating strategy, with China that weighs policy options against what allies will support while balancing U.S.-China relations.

Developing an effective foreign policy must begin with investing in education initiatives among U.S. officials, focused on greater understanding of China's strategy, culture and language. The U.S. needs to expand the ability to understand countries whose actions they're trying to influence. In part, this should expand to translation of Chinese writings to incorporate analysis of what the Chinese are saying. In addition, the U.S. should target investment in education programs that encourage higher education in areas relevant to national security, such as China, Chinese language, science, and technology.

The existing U.S.-China zero sum struggle for domination will drive both countries into a new Cold War. Improving bilateral relations must begin by building a level of trust through better understanding of core interests and concerns. In turn, this could inform a renewed crisis response and de-escalation strategy. Improving relations also requires a new strategic narrative, crafted through an orchestrated effort of senior advisors, military officials, business leaders, and skilled diplomats. The strategic narrative should be based on a coexistence strategy, focused on areas of collaboration and continually refining assumptions about changing capabilities, intentions, and actions. As the security situation in Hong Kong stabilizes, the U.S. and its partners should increase high ranking visits to demonstrate commitment and support diplomacy and education efforts through the U.S. Consulate. The U.S. should also increase regional

influence, currently dominated by Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin, by attending the East Asia Summit.

U.S. strategy must follow by repairing relationships with alliances and partners. Placing America first is an effective strategy for rallying the domestic base, but in practice, it has alienated our allies and justified the need to fight every partner over every trade issue to get a better deal.¹⁰⁴ Improving economic partnerships, such as India, Japan, Germany and the European Union (EU) can increase effectiveness in developing economic policies and influence relative to China.

The current U.S. policy of punishing Hong Kong for decisions originating in Beijing is not effective. As the U.S. reassesses its strategy, we should ask our allies to do the same. In turn, the goal should be to develop a multilateral strategy that builds upon the Sino-British Joint Declaration to prevent conditions that degrade existing freedoms and develop a long-term strategy, beyond 2047, to maintain long-term freedoms, such as freedom of the internet. The U.S. needs to discontinue the unilateral approach and develop international support for the long-term value in maintaining Hong Kong's one country-two systems form of government and coordinate a multilateral strategy for Hong Kong. Rather than unilateral sanctions that undermine the WTO, a multilateral strategy should reinforce the economic benefits of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and continuing business in Hong Kong contingent upon sustaining its unique form of government. Hong Kong's remains a strategic economic gateway to Asia (and China) and is China's largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI).¹⁰⁵ In 2018, Hong Kong's FDI totaled \$817 billion.¹⁰⁶ Of which, the five largest FDI in Hong Kong by democratic nations totaled \$455.6 billion; (comprised of: British Virgin Island - \$281.1 billion, United Kingdom - \$80 billion, Bermuda – \$50.3 billion, Japan \$24.6 billion, and the United States \$19.5 billion).¹⁰⁷

The U.S. should preserve the WTO and the principles by which the post-World War II system was created to do as it has been effective in managing China's behavior and maintaining global economic stability.¹⁰⁸ To force "the Chinese economy to be more market oriented, it should make better use of WTO rules by filing more complaints against China. While it is often accused of flouting the rules, China does a reasonably good job of complying with WTO complaints brought against it."¹⁰⁹ Rather than criticizing, undermining, disassembling or walking away from international organizations, the U.S. would benefit from leading solutions to improve problems, such as grievances with the dispute process within the WTO. The U.S. should also reinvest in multilateral institutions, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)— now the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), as trade rules are more favorable to the U.S. and less favorable to China. It also serves as a powerful mechanism to shape Chinese economic reform.

Conclusion

Unrest in Hong Kong will persist in response to the erosion of rights granted under the One-Country Two-Systems. The legal framework that preserves Hong Kong's autonomy is limited in duration; ultimately, China will determine the fate of Hong Kong beyond 2047. The U.S. has expressed support for Hong Kong's unique form of government since its return to China in 1997 but has repeatedly failed to adopt a strategy that supports this objective. Yet, sanctions remain the tool of choice for American foreign policy. "The ability of the United States to exact devastating economic tolls is unquestioned."¹¹⁰ U.S. decision makers have relied on the strength of the U.S. economy and the U.S. dollar to wield aggressive and unilateral sanctions against adversaries and national security threats, but throughout history, sanctions have largely proved ineffective in achieving the stated policy aims.

In recent years the U.S. has demonstrated a willingness to take a hard stance to China, prioritizing competition over cooperation. The U.S. needs to reconsider the maximalist coercive strategy with China without considering China's core interests and national strategy. This will lead to maximum failure. "A policy that only causes pain without achieving any of its stated goals hurts U.S. interests. It entrenches adversarial leaders, breeds resentment by inflicting pain on the populations,"¹¹¹ the resulting anti-American sentiments fuel the CCP legitimacy and aggressive policy initiatives by China. This erodes the effectiveness of U.S. coercive economic measures. One of Beijing's core interest is the unification of China, which includes the successful reunification and assimilation of Hong Kong. China perceives foreign interference in Hong Kong as a threat to its sovereignty and a red line for China. If China is pressed between sovereignty and economic hardship, the national strategy is clear. The U.S. needs to adapt a more cooperative negotiating strategy with China that considers China's core interests and weighs policy options against what allies will support while balancing long-term U.S.-China relations.

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