



***THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH:
ASPIRATIONS VS REALITIES OF
COEXISTENCE BETWEEN “THE WEST”
AND CHINA***

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China is the center of the global production network. It is the [largest trading partner](#) for all its neighbors and has fueled economic growth in and out of the Indo-Pacific for decades. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, trade has [deepened](#) between China and the United States, Canada, Japan, Southeast Asia, and with the European Union.

Clearly, our economies and societies benefit from our trade relationship with China when we enjoy stable relations. Chambers of Commerce from various countries still want to be part of the China story. The American Chamber of Commerce in China for instance in its [2022 White Paper](#) writes “We remain opposed to any effort at outright decoupling of the US-China relationship. The costs of decoupling from losing trade and foreign investment benefits for both countries would be significant and are unlikely to generate clear winners. To be globally competitive, American producers and service providers must be able to compete in the China market on a level playing field. Nevertheless, extensive market access barriers, protectionism, an opaque regulatory system, and discriminatory enforcement continue to hinder the operations of US business in China today.”

Similarly, the European Parliament’s [report](#) EU-China 2030: European expert consultation on future relations with China released in December 2022 states that in 2020, China became the EU’s largest trading partner for goods for the first time, surpassing the United States. This positive trade relationship, [according to](#) the European Business in China Position Paper 2022-2023, could be a platform for strengthening bilateral relations. Nonetheless, like their US counterparts, European trading partners have a lopsided trading relationship, as well as concerns about a lack of reciprocity in market access, supply chain resilience, and what [Kevin Rudd describes](#) as a strong tilt towards Marxist-Leninist market intervention and social organization based on a platform of nationalism.

Whether in Ottawa or Canberra, Paris or New Delhi, Washington or capitals in Southeast Asia, states around the world aspire to have cooperative and mutually beneficial economic, social, cultural, and security relationships with Beijing. The [Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy](#) highlights this stressing Ottawa will “cooperate with China to find solutions to global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, global health and nuclear proliferation.” The [EU Indo-Pacific Strategy](#) similarly states that “The EU will also pursue its multifaceted engagement with China, engaging bilaterally to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperating on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region.” Even Japan’s new [National Security Strategy](#), a strategy that includes provisions for counter strike capabilities, articulates the view that:

global issues such as climate change, infectious diseases, energy, food problems, and the environment, which have a direct or indirect impact on Japan's national security, Japan will expand the circle of cooperation not only to include its ally and like-minded countries (read China), but also many other countries and organizations, and then enhance international efforts.

Japan, Canada, and the European Union are not alone in their aspirations for cooperation with China. In a [speech](#) by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on the Biden administration's approach to the People's Republic of China, "investing, aligning, and competing" remain the core principles of a constructive relationship with China. Blinken stressed like other states, combating climate change, non-proliferation, transnational diseases, and "global macroeconomic coordination between the United States and China is key—through the G20, the IMF, other venues," to overcome the severe socio and economic consequences resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these aspirations for at least an awkward coexistence with China, there are many inconvenient truths to transforming aspiration into reality.

A track record of [political interference in elections](#) in the democratic process in [Canada](#), [Australia](#), and [other countries](#) suggests China wants to continue to weaken democratic institutions and countries aligned with the US.

In the report [The Communist Party's Coercive Diplomacy](#) by the Australia Strategic Policy Institute, the authors outlined at least 152 cases of Beijing using coercion against Australia, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and others between 2010 and 2020. Coercion examples included arbitrary detention, trade restrictions, restrictions on investment, official travel, tourism, popular boycotts and state issued threats.

Both actions clearly violate China's long standing [Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence](#), not to mention Beijing's refusal to [condemn Putin's Ukraine war](#).

We also continue to see China and prominent Chinese academics such as [Yan Xue Tong](#) stress that:

China will work hard to shape an ideological environment conducive to its rise and counter Western values. For example, the United States defines democracy and freedom from the perspective of electoral politics and personal expression, while China defines democracy and

freedom from the perspective of social security and economic development. Washington should accept these differences of opinion instead of trying to impose its own views on others.

In short, according to the Asia Pacific Initiative's Naoko Eto, China sees the current rules-based order is not aligned with its domestic political system and its [new interpretations of norms](#) such as human rights, transparency, democracy, rule-of-law that have been the foundation for the post-World War II period of peace, stability, and development.

Seeking to [selectively weaken](#) international institutions, norms, and practices, China's objectives conflict directly with not only the so-called West but also many countries in the Global South including those in Southeast and South Asia. By way of example, the ASEAN way of consensus-based decision making has been [hijacked by Beijing](#) in an effort to come to a code of conduct in the South China Sea.

We have also seen Beijing coordinate with other authoritarian states and Belt and Road Initiative partners in their decision-making in international institutions that affect the Global South, including religious and ethnic minorities. Recent examples include Beijing's efforts to lobby and create a coalition of developing states to [vote down a motion](#) to discuss a UN report into China's serious human rights violations in Xinjiang. We also saw Beijing [brought together BRI members](#) to abstain from a resolution on Russia's "aggression against Ukraine."

Domestically in China, in April 22, 2013, "A Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere" was approved and released by the central leadership under Xi Jinping. Known as [Document 9](#), the communique stresses guarding against seven political "perils," including constitutionalism, civil society, "nihilistic" views of history, "universal values," "promoting neoliberalism, attempting to change China's basic economic system," "questioning reform and opening and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics," and the promotion of "the West's view of media."

The non-Chinese world is a crack in the Marxist-Leninist system the Communist Party of China (CPC) wishes to imprint in Chinese society. As a result, the party works through the [United Front activities](#) to delegitimize, stigmatize and weaken the norms outlined in Document 9 abroad.

The inconvenient truth is that Xi Jinping's [Community of Common Destiny for Mankind](#) and the post-WWII rules-based order—which has been based on US leadership but supported by developed and developing nations alike—are an uncomfortable fit at best or incompatible at worst.

Establishing an awkward coexistence between China and like-minded countries will require transforming aspirations into pragmatic, realistic initiatives. Lyle J. Goldstein advocates for “[cooperation spirals](#)” in which confidence is developed through tit-for-tat compromises that spiral up towards more significant cooperation. His focus was Taiwan, economic relations, environmental issues (most critically climate change), the developing world (Africa in particular), the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, Japan, Southeast Asia, and India.

Japan's late Abe Shinzo took a different approach prior to the pandemic through engagement in third country infrastructure [cooperation](#) and trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to reform the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese trade practices from within.

Abe's and Goldstein's approaches to China are based on realistic assessment of the parallel paths China and “the West” are traveling on and realism about the prospects of convergence and changing China. Based on the principles of engagement, resilience and deterrence, each conceptualized a non-zero sum approach to engaging with China firmly wedded to working with like-minded countries

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.