"The World According to the 'China and the West Dialogue' (CWD)": 4 Approaches from American foreign policy making toward China and the liberal order

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Not a New Cold War

The purpose of this Note is to describe four thematically distinct approaches developed, or being developed, by U.S. experts and policymakers with respect to China and the contemporary liberal order. Each approach describes a distinct way in which U.S. foreign policy is likely to view the U.S.-China relationship and global governance issues that threaten the contemporary liberal order.

From the CWD perspective, an adequate approach to the U.S.- relationship with China will not be found to rest in a simple binary rivalry. As Richard Haass the President of the Council on Foreign Relations has argued: "A rising chorus of American voices now argues that confronting China should become the organizing principle of U.S. foreign policy, akin to the Cold War against the Soviet Union. But this would be a major strategic error." Far too many analysts today are attempting to recreate at least shades of the Cold War context –a kind of Cold War 2.0 – this between the U.S. and China as opposed to the United States and the Soviet Union.[1] Instead, as we see it,

[1] And if not Cold War 2.0, then as Kevin Rudd (2020), the former Prime Minister of Australia has framed the coming relationship one might well consider Cold War 1.5. Rudd anticipates a growing rivalry. As he describes it: "Strategic rivalry will now define the entire spectrum of the U.S.-Chinese relationship—military, economic, financial, technological, ideological—and increasingly shape Beijing's and Washington's relationships with third countries." To be fair, while many of the experts in these four

today's U.S.-China rivalry is best understood within a much larger framework of North America, Latin America, Europe, China and various Asian countries. It is not just an examination of the growing U.S.-China rivalry but is also critically focused on the many alliances formed and the numerous allies won by the United States over the decades across the globe. These alliance relationships are a critical part of this story of the liberal order. And, current global governance, we anticipate is likely to be, given current U.S. leadership, far more multilateral, and even in various instances collaboration without the United States. As a result, we raise in this Note the prospects of what we have referred to previously as 'effective multilateralism'. This multilateralism, we have urged (V20 Blue Report, 2019) can be an instrument of international policymaking in the emerging liberal order.

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approaches raise the spectre possibly of a renewed Cold War, almost all reject such a view of the relationship between China and the U.S. China, as a rival in the contemporary liberal order is far from what the Soviet Union was during the Cold War and most experts are quite alert to the material differences.

Four Approaches to U.S. foreign policy with China

	Security Threat	**Values Clash**	**International Institutions**	**Solution**
'China Hawks'	YES	YES	Not relevant	Decoupling, Confrontation
New 'Spheres of Influence' - A Grand Bargain	YES	Not important	Not important Power relations govern	Spheres of influence
Strategic Competition	YES	YES – threat to liberal order	Allies, institutions and rulemaking,	US-China Rivalry/Rule Making by US and Allies
Strategic Engagement	Yes, but bundled with common interests	Not essential and not actionable	Critical dimension – multiple coalitions and global & regional institutions	'Effective Multilateralism' All can lead – focus on global threats

The Current Four Visions of U.S.-China Rivalry

In the introduction to the fireside chat held by Stephen Hadley and Susan Rice on U.S.-China relations at Brookings on October 30, 2018, Paul Gewirtz the Director of the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale Law School and one of the convenors of this fireside chat opened the discussion this way: "They [Hadley and Rice] expressed a substantial degree of agreement on current challenges and priorities. Both believe that the relationship with China has entered a new stage of significantly more competition and that

the central challenge is to find effective ways to manage this more intense competition while also developing areas of cooperation."

What follows in this Note are four distinct approaches that we believe various experts have described or elaborated on in examining the U.S.-China relationship. Their statements and policy prescriptions regarding U.S.-China relations mark out distinct approaches for American foreign policy. These descriptions, as set out here, are in no way complete, but we thought in this Note we could at least elaborate the four visions proposed by foreign policy circles concerned with U.S.-China relations and suggest the implications of each approach for the relationship.

The 'China Hawks'

The Washington Beltway has become a haven for 'China Hawks', seemingly. Those espousing an existential rivalry between China and the United States are increasingly present and vocal particularly among the think tank community but also in current officialdom. The Trump Administration repeatedly has expressed through its statements and public policy documents, including military and political, that the days of cooperation, or engagement, are over and officials represent the leading edge of the 'China Hawk' foreign policy approach.

In October 2018, the current Vice President, Mike Pence in a major speech at the conservative Hudson Institute commenced his formal remarks by setting forth what he saw as the U.S.-China problem: "China wants nothing less than to push the United States of America from the Western Pacific and attempt to prevent us from coming to the aid of our allies." (Frum, 2019). And the current Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo (2019), in a blunt in examination of US-China relations has insisted that the Trump Administration foreign policy is a dramatic break from previous administrations with China. As he argued: "This is a departure, for sure. It might be viewed as unconventional. It's not what you've heard from leaders for the last two decades plus. Frankly, we've been slow to see the risk of China – the risk that it poses to American national security, because we wanted friendship with the People's Republic from the very start. And because we, as Americans, always continue to hope for that." For Pompeo the rivalry is between

two dramatically different value systems. As he urged later in these remarks, at the Hudson Institute: “I’ll talk about the competing ideologies and values and the impact that has on America and the world. The Chinese Communist Party is a Marxist-Leninist Party focused on struggle and international domination. We need only listen to the words of their leaders.” The United States needs to meet this rivalry, according to Pompeo, by insisting on free and open trade, ending the Chinese practices of technological and intellectual property theft, meeting the threat from China in the Indo-Pacific where he believes: “China threatens America’s national security by developing asymmetric weapons that threaten our strategic assets too.”

J. Stapleton Roy (2019) long engaged in U.S. diplomatic action in Asia suggested this about the Trump Administration and their aggressive attitudes and policies towards China in contrast to past administrations: “Since feckless diplomacy has brought us to these dire straits, our response must be to forego cooperation with China, contain its expansionist proclivities, sabotage its economic rise, and decouple our economy from that of China.” Even more recently Roy (2020) added the following: “There is a broad consensus within the Trump administration and among members of Congress that the United States is locked in an ‘existential’ struggle with a hostile China intent on shifting the global and regional balance of power. Based on such assumptions, US national strategy documents describe China as the principal threat to the United States in an international arena marked by competition. But in practice, the Trump administration’s approach to the region has reflected the proclivities of the President.” The last sentence is significant as it reflects a Trump policy most notably of a U.S.-China tariff war. The Administration has gone further in waging a technology war, also, most emphatically with China’s technology champion, Huawei. But more recently the Administration additionally has urged that the China Telecom license for the U.S. be revoked by the administrative authorities, in this case the FCC.

As former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley - touted as a possible future Republican candidate for president - argued in *Foreign Affairs* (2019) “China poses intellectual, technological, political, diplomatic, and military challenges to the United States. The necessary response is similarly multifaceted, …” “China requires a response that is not just “whole of

government" but "whole of nation." Fortunately, there is support across the political spectrum for countering China's new aggressive policies. We must act now, before it's too late. The stakes are high. They could be life or death."

This Administration has pushed back – at least rhetorically – against China. The tariffs against China have gone up, there is a growing effort to block Chinese technology and to urge a 'decoupling' between the United States and China. Whether such decoupling is possible is unclear, but its costs seem all too apparent. As Fareed Zakaria (2019) has suggested: "The United States is in competition with China—that is a fact and will remain so for much of this century. The issue is whether the United States should compete within a stable international framework, continuing to try to integrate China rather than attempting to isolate it at all costs. A fractured, bifurcated international order, marked by government restrictions and taxes on trade, technology, and travel, would result in diminished prosperity, persistent instability, and the real prospect of military conflict for all involved." What appears to be the core of this approach is a view that China's rise is existential and needs to be contained everywhere whether economically, technologically, or in national security terms and the efforts must now be put in place to decouple from China notwithstanding the tightly integrated relationship that has been built over the decades. Unfortunately, this approach underestimates the highly integrated nature of the global economy and the destructive and impoverishing effect of a protectionist world that decoupling efforts will bring. It also ignores the urgent need to tackle global and transnational problems on a collective basis.

New 'Spheres of Influence' - A Grand Bargain

In the Campbell Sullivan (2019) *Foreign Affairs* article, discussed below in the next section, the two authors acknowledge that one strategic policy vision that might represent U.S. policy going forward is what they refer to as an "accommodative "grand bargain". Such an approach "would effectively concede to China a sphere of influence in Asia" (100). Campbell and Sullivan, it should be pointed out, reject this largely 'realist spheres of influence' approach arguing that it is no more likely to be successful than containment in the current circumstances of U.S.-China rivalry. But there

are others who accept the changing power balance in the Indo-Pacific and draw the appropriate consequences, as they see it, for U.S. policy there.

A global policy built on structural factors, power distribution notably, fits neatly with those experts that focus on the realist dynamics in international relations. Notable among them is Stephen Walt. From such power dynamics Walt (2013) has long called into question the balance of forces in the Asia-Pacific. He raised some years ago the changing power balance in. in the Asia-Pacific. As he argued: “And on that subject, the main issue is whether China will continue to tolerate America’s extensive and powerful military presence in East Asia or whether it will conduct a sustained effort to drive a wedge between the United States and its current allies and eventually force the United States out of the region.” He and his sometime collaborator John Mearsheimer, according to Walt, have long argued that: “… a rising China is likely to want to force the United States out of Asia. I mean, seriously: What great power would want to be ringed by neighbors that have close security partnerships with its main peer competitor and would want that same rival to keep a lot of potent military forces near its shores?” This perspective by Walt and other realists promotes a “spheres of influence approach” in the critical Asia-Pacific region.

Others have followed this realist perspective more recently. Harvard’s Graham Allison (2020), for instance, has written about the ‘new spheres of influence’. He provides a complete perspective that seems both pessimistic but also defensive. The Allison approach speaks in ‘Great Power’ language and accepts that the two rivals – the U.S. and China are it. For Allison it is time for the United States to recognize that the ‘unipolar moment’ has passed. As he concludes: “Unipolarity is over, and with it the illusion that other nations would simply take their assigned place in a U.S.-led international order. For the United States, that will require accepting the reality that there are spheres of influence in the world today—and that not all of them are American spheres.”

Allison sums up the power dynamics of the current international system this way: “Going forward, U.S. policymakers will have to abandon unattainable aspirations for the worlds they dreamed of and accept the fact that spheres of influence will remain a central feature of geopolitics.” While the United States may continue to exert a sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere and with allies in Europe, the Western Pacific will be altered by

a ‘rising China’. This spheres of influence redrawing of the global order will have dramatic effects presumably on regional trade, investment, financial and security policies and in turn on the global order. Most particularly it will have dramatic effects on Asia relations and the many allies in the Asia-Pacific that have no interest in accepting a hegemonic China. The impacts on these significant allies in the Asia-Pacific – South Korea, Japan, could be quite detrimental and that doesn’t even take into account the consequences for Taiwan.

‘Strategic Competition’

What seems to have become rather commonplace in the discourse on the liberal order is the view that the United States is engaged in a growing rivalry between the leading powers, the United States and China. Exactly what those consequences, might be remains unclear. We turn again to J. Stapleton Roy, the Founding Director Emeritus and a Distinguished Scholar at the Wilson Center’s Kissinger Institute on China and the United States. The Ambassador recently argued (2020): “There seems to be a broad consensus among China watchers, the administration, and members of congress that we are locked in a life and death struggle with China, and that our engagement policy not only failed to transform China into a liberal democracy but also turned a blind eye to China’s ravaging of our intellectual property.”

In a view that is likely to ‘weigh on’ these two senior Democratic officials, Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan (2019, 96), declare in the introduction to their recent *Foreign Affair’s* article: “Although Washington remains bitterly divided on most issues, there is a growing consensus that the era of engagement with China has come to an unceremonious close. The debate now is over what comes next.” With that, and with their Democratic credentials, Campbell and Sullivan launch their vision of ‘strategic competition’ in U.S.-China relations. And these insights and approaches described in the article have not gone unnoticed. *Financial Times* columnist Gideon Rachman (2020) wrote: “In a recent article, two of the Democrats’ leading foreign-policy thinkers, Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, endorsed the “growing consensus that the era of engagement with China has come to an unceremonious close”. Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Campbell, both of whom would be likely to take senior jobs in a Biden administration, accept the

Trump team's concept of "strategic competition" with China — arguing only for a more nuanced and intelligent pursuit of that strategy.

In the politically polarized environment that is Washington it is striking to see this consensus that has been achieved seemingly over U.S.-China policy. As political scientist Daniel Drezner has noted (2020): "For all the talk about the politics of Washington being more polarized than ever, the bipartisanship of the new consensus about China is striking. If Democrats have opposed the Trump administration's actions, it is mostly because they think the actions haven't gone far enough. When Trump escalated the trade war with China in spring 2019, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted, "Don't back down. Strength is the only way to win with China."

As many have argued, China hawks and strategic competition folks alike think the failure of engagement is a result of the belief that such an engagement posture toward China would, according to the two authors (2019, 97) "bring about fundamental changes to China's political system, economy, and foreign policy". While this not the place to enter into a sustained discussion of what U.S. leaders thought engagement with China would achieve, there are two things worth reflecting on in this discussion about the strategy of engagement. First, a first-rate and rather detailed analysis has been carried out already by Harvard's Alastair Iain Johnston (2019). Johnston looks closely at the Clinton Administration which launched the policy. And he argues (2019, 106-107): "In short, whether China politically liberalized or not was up to China's leaders and required external pressure. It was not the inexorable effect of economic development per se. … Clinton's successors continued to refrain from drawing a direct causal line from engagement to democratization." There is no doubt that many wished for liberalization in China, and still do, but it is a measure of revision to suggest that leadership believed it would occur. As Johnston (2019, 109) concludes in his analysis: "Either way, according to the engagement argument, a positive outcome in democratizing the Chinese government was neither inevitable, nor even the principal goal of engagement." His conclusion is backed by long time official and academic Tom Fingar of Stanford University. In a recent Stanford webinar moderated by David Lampton (2020), Fingar suggested that the imputation of the intention to democratize China was never part of U.S. policy logic but is often part of Chinese characterization of US intentions. Revisionist Americans,

according to Fingar have adopted a Chinese logic, in essence. The narrative, according to Fingar misconstrues rationale and goals of American policy. It is instrumental - a rationalization to justify calls for a different policy toward China and with much of the world.

In addition, and to our second point, it is fair to say that China has become highly integrated and adopted various liberal norms of the liberal order with the caveat that such integration is more significant on some dimensions as opposed to others. For instance, China has become part of the global trading system led by the United States, though China has been more resistant to its WTO commitments and market reform. China is also supportive of many international organizations of the liberal order, such as the United Nations, but it is also evident that China has failed to adopt democratic norms.

Well, then, leaving aside those presumed failures of engagement, what then is the appropriate U.S. policy for those who believe that a strategic competition posture is required by Washington?

Again, turning to Campbell and Sullivan, they suggest that the U.S. goal is to, as they say, “establish favorable terms of coexistence with Beijing in four key competitive domains—military, economic, political, and global governance”. If the U.S. can achieve such favorable terms of co-existence, then the United States can secure its security interests without “triggering the kind of threat perceptions that characterized the U.S.-Soviet rivalry.” In each policy area Sullivan and Campbell suggest a collective U.S., and significantly a U.S. and allied collaboration to refine rules, to push back against China’s illiberal behavior, for instance, China’s policy toward the Uighur minority, and to press forward on support for democracy by urging transparency and accountability, and to right the balance in the case of the strategic military effort principally in the Asia-Pacific. Taking up just one example, trade, the two authors urge (2019, 106): that the “United States should consider starting a rules-setting initiative of market democracies layered over the WTO system, which would fill these gaps.” Reciprocity would then govern the trade relationship between China and the liberal order. As the now presumptive presidential candidate Joe Biden has argued according to CFR: “the free world” must unite in the face of China’s “high-tech authoritarianism” and that Washington must shape the “rules,

norms, and institutions" that will govern the global use of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence." This is no partnership with China.

In the big picture what is required is a change in the policy behavior by the United States as it seeks to meet the growing competition and rivalry with China. For the two authors what is required is an alteration in the balance between competition and cooperation between China and the United States. They suggest that American policy toward China, historically at least, has been to cooperate with China in the first instance and to compete only second while China has behaved in reverse. Campbell and Sullivan (2019, 109) conclude: "Although it may seem counterintuitive, competition is likely essential to effective cooperation with Beijing." Moreover, The United States policy makers need to avoid negotiating any linkages "between Chinese assistance on global challenges and concessions on U.S. interests."

As identified earlier, in the implementation of a strategic competition posture, a critical feature in the U.S.-China rivalry is the support provided by the many U.S. allies globally. As Campbell and Sullivan (2019, 110) urge: "The combined weight of U.S. allies and partners can shape China's choices across all domains—but only if Washington deepens all those relationships and works to tie them together." The competition first approach combined with strong allied collaboration will, in their view, achieve successful results in the competition with China and a better balance in U.S.-China relations.

Importantly then while these experts reject engagement and assume a far more competitive U.S.-China relationship, they reject current Trump Administration policymaking. From their policy stance of strategic competition, the Trump administration foreign policy towards China is unable to effect a successful strategic competition strategy. The 'America First' Trumpian approach attacks allies in Europe and in Asia and incorporates simplistic demands for enhanced allied payments to secure American alliance support. The Administration avoids multilateral action and undermines in myriad policy ways the successful application of strategic competition policy in future American foreign policy. As Jake argued (2019) in a piece that attacked Trump foreign policy: "He treats foreign policy in simple terms: us against them. He sizes up the European Union and NATO and sees a bunch of smaller countries banding together

to take advantage of the United States, on trade, security, migration, you name it. Trump's worldview is one of grievance and victimization: "They're laughing at us." Or as William Burns (2020) a long serving U.S. diplomat, and now head of the CEIP has written on Trump foreign policy: "To regain our footing after the pandemic and avoid fumbling what's left of our primacy, American leaders will have to avoid the snares and delusions of the post-pandemic world. Most dangerous among them is the Trumpian hubris of "America first," the reckless conviction that American power is best served unilaterally, unencumbered by allies who only take advantage of us or the enlightened self-interest that has animated U.S. statecraft at its best. … In this one, the Trump White House's blend of arrogance and ineptitude, against the backdrop of more than three years of diplomatic disarmament, is a force divider—exposing our citizenry to greater peril."

The success of strategic competition, according to Campbell and Sullivan will occur through the following strategy: It should seek to achieve not a definitive end state akin to the Cold War's ultimate conclusion but a steady state of clear-eyed coexistence on terms favorable to U.S. interests and values. … Going forward, China policy must be about more than the kind of relationship the United States wants to have; it must also be about the kinds of interests the United States wants to secure. The steady state Washington should pursue is rightly about both: a set of conditions necessary for preventing a dangerous escalatory spiral, even as competition continues." It is coexistence with competition. Yet the approach leans on the competitive and the United States, with its allies, determining rules, values and norms of the global order. But such an approach cannot achieve a stable order. The rising power, the other leading state cannot remain just a rule taker for the order. Relations and the order can only be achieved and global challenges successfully addressed with a far more a collective collaborative partnership of states.

'Strategic Engagement'

While, geopolitics is declared resurgent, in many respects it never really left. But many chose to ignore it, or to wish it away in the recent past. That being said, many of the problems of global governance lie beyond geopolitics even when confronted primarily by the leading states.

Still the rising tensions and competition between China and the United States puts a ‘sharper edge’ on current geopolitics. It is evident in the relationship of these two leading states that neither ‘corners the market’ on virtue. Both have taken positions that have harmed the relationship and raised the ire of the other. For instance, the early decision by the United States to not take China to the WTO for violations the Protocol of Accession permitted China to ignore commitments that it had made to the WTO members. The U.S. and its allies ultimately failed to hold China to these commitments to market reform. And, so we see the rising accusations from U.S. politicians and business interests, in particular, that China is injuring U.S. interests. China has erred in assuming that U.S. policy action by the United States, with the previous Obama Administration in particular, was all about containing China. The accusations have flown between these two leading states and has risen dramatically with the Trump Administration.

The ‘handle’ we have chosen for this fourth approach to U.S. foreign policy – “strategic engagement” is quite conscious. We believe that those espousing the ‘strategic competition’ approach have fallen on the wrong side of the coexistence-competition debate and policy balance in U.S.-China relations. While there have been instances where the U.S. has led with cooperation and China with competition, to describe the whole of the U.S. policy as such and China the reverse seems to us to be well overdrawn. Like strategic competition, strategic engagement is concerned with the maintenance of alliances and support for allies and the liberal order but far less for geostrategic advantage than for achieving collaboration to meet the global challenges that face the liberal order.

There are global policy issues where collaboration is not only helpful, but indeed necessary and required. Today the world faces a global pandemic – COVID-19. The lack of collaborative effort between these leading powers appears to have undermined collective efforts such as in the G20. And these truncated collaborative efforts have been evident recently in a variety of policy efforts from pandemics, to climate change and to the elimination of energy subsidies, naming but just a few of the many issues that can only likely be resolved through collective action. And beyond these collective action issues, other transnational policy challenges, many of which are more traditional foreign policy matters - trade policy, financial reform

policies, refugees and asylum seekers, all these issues can be achieved effectively and efficiently only through collaborative decision making on top of national decision making aimed to achieve collaboration to meet global challenges.

We are quite sensitive to the current poor state of relations between China and the United States. Yes, the two leading states were able to call a halt to the escalating trade war, though it is more likely a ceasefire rather than a resolution of trade and investment policies between the two. And the war of words over the Covid-19 origins and now a rising chorus in American political circles to sanction China for these early failures underscores the continuing antagonism and jockeying for advantage by both. So, it may well be that there may be limitations to collaboration in the immediate atmosphere. Especially with an America First Trump foreign policy and a highly nationalist Xi Jinping leadership the leading powers are seemingly crippled.

Notwithstanding this, we do not accept that only the leading states can lead. Nor do we accept the view that if the United States fails to lead then the liberal order will unravel, as say Robert Kagan (2018) at Brookings argues. And still others argue that without the collaboration of at least the two leading powers, the U.S. and China, broader collective action is unlikely if not impossible.

Strategic engagement assumes that other states can step up. They have the capacity, in our view, to develop collective leadership in the absence of the leading powers. The exigencies of global governance can be met with the leadership by various rising powers, established powers, developing powers and others, even where the leading states fail to take the lead. But it requires real commitment by these states, not just rhetoric, to build these coalitions and then pursue meaningful collaboration.

We have found in the CWD that generating greater political commitment to the national social challenges is a threat to governance capacity in all our countries. Prioritizing the social impacts of policies and programs could go some way to mobilizing domestic systemic transformations which would include: strengthening public health, our educations systems, and increasing the sustainability of energy, transportation and infrastructure systems. These efforts likely will require serious private and public

investments and likely lead to reductions in military spending, among other things. Reducing geopolitical tensions then becomes a requirement for collective efforts to align global governance and the global system of international institutions with the social impact on citizens. Such policy efforts will generate the necessary resonance and reinforcement between domestic and global efforts. Investment in citizens and the policies impacting directly on their welfare should be the new drivers of economic growth rather than consumption, government spending including on the military.

"Strategic engagement" reframes, rebalances and reconceptualizes the current toxic US-China tensions by "pluralizing" them by eliciting the pro-active participation of other significant states and regions in Europe, Asia, the Americas to create pressures for "effective multilateralism". The easy 'low road' is to demonize one of the other players and ramp up the competition. The 'high road' is to see the systemic failures revealed by the pandemic and the intensity of the human costs and to recalibrate the balance between global cooperation and competition. Such rebalancing of the global order relations can make international community more effective and more responsive and creating a "global order for all" based on putting people and the planet first.

Elsewhere, we have written about multilateral leadership (V20-Brookings, 2019). This not just traditional middle power multilateralism, that frequently gets raised, but we can identify the efforts, for instance, of members of the G20. In our view, what we described as 'Effective Multilateralism' is both possible and perhaps necessary in the face of U.S.- China 'bad behavior'. We have written previously about the 'shoots' of effective multilateralism. Such shoots are there in the international system. For example, Japan's successful effort to save the Trans-Pacific Partnership. in the face of the Trump Administration withdrawal from this trade liberalizing agreement corralling the remaining 11 countries and securing the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). We have seen German and French leadership in the G20 to insist on a statement supporting the Paris Climate Change Agreement, notwithstanding U.S. resistance to such a statement in the German and Japanese G20 leaders' declarations.

This form of multilateral leadership is defined as "selective, targeted, and purposeful actions with varied coalitions. Others have suggested that such

leadership is possible. At the time of the opening of the UN General Assembly this past year, the “Alliance for Multilateralism” was launched by the French and German Foreign Ministers. According to its website, the Alliance “… is an informal network of countries united in their conviction that a rules-based multilateral order is the only reliable guarantee for international stability and peace and that our common challenges can only be solved through cooperation.” In the end, of course, it is not what is announced but what is accomplished.

Therefore, we accept that strategic engagement extends beyond just American foreign policy and U.S.-China competition and co-existence. It is built on a foundation of multilateralism. Strategic engagement is a foreign policy approach that rebalances the relationship between competition and cooperation – favoring appropriate cooperation in the U.S.-China competition but also devising collaborative actions in the face of global challenges. And, it builds a prosperous and stable world without demanding only American leadership, but also not letting the US or China ‘off the hook’. Strategic engagement implies that a renewed effort might be feasible now, with the real possibility of a new Administration in Washington, especially if other nations and leaders are already stepping up to push forward to meet the growing global challenges.

*The authors of this article are the principals of VISION20 (V20), an informal G20 engagement group formed in 2016 and active in the THINK20 (T20) network of think tanks. As such they are the founders in 2018 of the China and the West Dialogue (CWD) which consists of thought leaders currently from Europe, Canada, China, Chile and the United States who are joining together to develop alternative frameworks for China-West relations in the 2020s by pluralizing and rebalancing the US-China bilateral relationship by including other significant countries and thereby reframing global governance.

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