

# *The Cause of the Current Conflict Between China and the United States*

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**Abstract:** The relationship between China and the U.S. has always been one of the most concerned focuses of global politics, and many people believe that the biggest difference between China and the U.S. lies in their ideological differences. However, from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the victory of the U.S. in the Cold War, it can be judged that ideology is not the biggest difference between the socialist countries and the capitalist countries, instead, the national interest is the biggest conflict point. Therefore, this paper analyzes the conflict points and strategic differences between China and the U.S. from three angles: trade disputes, the Taiwan issue, and strategic conflicts. After analysis, it can be concluded that the trade dispute is one of the main points of Sino-US relations, and the Taiwan issue is the top priority as well as the most sensitive topic between the two countries. Meanwhile, there is also a conflict of strategic interests between the U.S., which is committed to dominating the world, and China, which advocates peace and mutual assistance. The conflict between China and the U.S. will have a significant influence on the world's political economy, and the principles of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect should be the guidance, which is the key to keeping international order and global stability.

**Keywords:** U.S.-China Relations, Trade Disputes, Taiwan Issue, Strategic Conflict

## 1. Introduction

The game between the two world powers, China and the U.S., has always been an important focus, and their relations has been more complex during the thirty-four years since they established diplomatic relations. After China's reform and opening up, its relationship with the U.S. has always been in a state of cooperation and friction. In early 2018, the trade dispute between China and the U.S. aroused widespread attention and heated discussion. During this period, the U.S. unilaterally imposed tariffs and other measures on China, while China also implemented countermeasures against the U.S. Meanwhile, the two powers also have many conflicts and differences in the political and military fields. Recent years have been the most tense years in China-US relations. With the conclusion of the 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, the meeting between the heads of state of China and the U.S. also came to an end. This meeting has received a huge response, and it is also believed to be the node for the de-escalation of China-US relations. Nowadays, China and the U.S. play a crucial role in the development of global social processes. Against this background, this paper explores in detail the conflicts and controversies that exist in the US-China relationship and the reasons behind them. As the world's most important bilateral relationship,

changes in Sino-US relations will affect the entire world, and tensions between China and the U.S. have a huge influence on both the global economic and political landscape. Therefore, the direction between China and the U.S., whether it is cooperation or confrontation, will have an important impact on the globe, which reflects the importance of this research paper.

## 2. Trade Disputes

Trade disputes are one of the main points in the game of US-China relations and one of the most important issues to be discussed at the 2023 meeting between the US and Chinese heads of state. The trade dispute between China and the U.S. can be traced back to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The U.S. did not recognize the Chinese government and fought with the Chinese army on the Korean battlefield when the Korean war broke out in 1950. Meanwhile, the U.S. imposed a powerful blockade and embargo on China's foreign trade, which was carried out at various levels, from interfering with transportation to controlling the export of goods. By 1953, the normal trade between China and the U.S. was completely interrupted, and since then China and the U.S. began more than two decades of trade disruption. In 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon visited China, and this "ice-breaking trip" restored exchanges between these two powers. In 1979, China and the U.S. formally established diplomatic relations, thus their abnormal diplomatic relations came to an end. In 2001, U.S. President Bush announced that China was given the status of permanent normal trade relations, from which the two countries began to normalize trade. But in 2018, U.S. President Trump announced an increase in tariffs on \$60 billion in Chinese imports and restrictions on Chinese companies investing in the U.S., and the "China-US trade war" began.

A trade war spearheaded by the U.S. will not only cause a sharp decline in the relationship between the two countries but will also have a great impact on the people of the two countries as well as the global economy. In his research, Cheng Mengda points out that "the U.S. began to impose 25% and 10% import duties on steel and aluminum products imported from China in March 2018, to which China immediately took reciprocal countermeasures [1]." In this trade war, the U.S. has imposed tariffs on thousands of items involved in imports from China, including almost all areas such as the agricultural industry and the light industry, which will have a huge impact on a large exporting country like China. At the same time, China's counter-sanctions will also increase the production costs of Chinese enterprises. In the implementation of the means of sanctions, the U.S. implemented blockade sanctions on China's high-tech industries such as Huawei and DJI. In the chip industry, the global sanctions suppress Huawei, which is undoubtedly a huge challenge for China's weak chip industry. The sanctions implemented by the U.S. will certainly have an effect on the development of the U.S. domestic economy and industry. Tao Shigui and Qiu Xinyu summarize eight different reasons why Chinese entities are sanctioned based on the list issued by the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security. In 2019, the U.S. ostensibly added Dahua Technology, Hikvision, KDDI, and Meyer Baer to the "Entity List" on the grounds of "scientific and technological surveillance" and "human rights abuses", but in reality, the list was intended to be a "list of entities" for the purpose of "supporting China's military modernization" and "involving China's military-civilian integration construction projects". "The list of entities is actually designed to prevent Chinese Artificial Intelligence technology from further development. The U.S. has sanctioned sixty-six entities for "jeopardizing U.S. national security and interests," including Huawei and 62 of its subsidiaries [2]." From the list of entities, it is clear that the U.S. has not sanctioned Huawei or any of its subsidiaries [2]. From the data, it can be concluded that the ultimate goal of the U.S. sanctions is to keep its international status and hegemony, and these unsubstantiated excuses show that the growing Chinese military and Chinese economy have seriously jeopardized the U.S.'s international status. All the sanctioned enterprises have a common political purpose, which is to sanction China's military modernization and development.

Sanctions against China have a significant impact on the U.S. itself. China is the U.S.'s number one trading partner, and the economic impact of sanctions against China, including the increase in production costs, can be felt by U.S. businesses. But this is also an opportunity for the U.S. to reduce the "Made-in-China" products. China is the world's only whole industrial chain, with all the industrial categories of the country. Since the reform and opening up, the world manufacturing center has gradually shifted to China. The U.S. has become very dependent on China's manufacturing industry. Undoubtedly, the U.S. does not want to see the development of China's scientific and technological strength. This is the U.S. "America first" principle, which has produced a serious paradox. But the facts have proved that China and the U.S. "decoupling" is not characteristic of this era and is not in line with the fundamental interests of the people of the two countries. In the speculation of China and the U.S. "decoupling" five years later, the U.S. Department of Commerce data show that the total trade in goods between China and the U.S. in 2022 reached 6906 billion U.S. dollars, a record high. In the first two years of the trade war, the China-US trade was greatly affected, but from 2021 onwards, there has been a significant rebound, and in 2022, a new historical record. China's Ministry of Commerce said that "China and the U.S. economic and trade cooperation is of vital interest to the people of the two countries and plays a pivotal role in global economic growth. The 2022 statistics of both sides show that China and the U.S. bilateral trade hit a new record high, showing a strong resilience. This fully illustrates the highly complementary economic structure of China and the U.S., as well as the mutually beneficial and win-win nature of economic and trade cooperation [3]." The trade war has seriously hindered the normal trade exchanges between the two countries and will have a great effect on the world economy. As the top two economies in the world, China and the U.S. should pursue common development for the benefit of the people from these two countries.

### 3. Taiwan Issue

The Taiwan issue is the biggest problem in China-US relations for all Chinese people. It is also the most sensitive topic in the relationship between the two countries. The Taiwan issue is China's internal affair and should not be a factor in Sino-US relations, but the U.S. wants to use Taiwan to contain mainland China and treats Taiwan as a pawn on the "international chessboard" in the Pacific Ocean.

As early as the founding of diplomatic relations between China and the U.S., the Taiwan issue was the most contentious issue between the two sides. At that time, China and the U.S. conducted several rounds of negotiations on the topic of Taiwan, and the progress was not smooth. The U.S. side finally decided and declared that there would be no U.S. consulate in Taiwan and hoped that the Taiwan issue would be resolved peacefully. However, the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan has been unable to reach a consensus on the issue of China's economic development and foreign trade. Since there was an urgent need to normalize relations between them at that time, China agreed to leave this issue temporarily until after the establishment of their diplomatic relations. In 1972, U.S. President Nixon visited China and reconfirmed the five principles of the U.S. on the Taiwan issue in his talks with Zhou Enlai: First, Taiwan is a part of China, and there is only one China; the U.S. will no longer make any statement like "the status of Taiwan is not yet determined"; second, the U.S. has not supported and will not support any movement for Taiwan's "independence"; third, Gradually withdrawing from Taiwan, the U.S. will try to use its influence to prevent Japan from entering Taiwan; fourth, the U.S. supports any peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue; fifth, the U.S. will not support Taiwan's "counter-attack on the mainland" [4]. In 1979, China and the U.S. officially established diplomatic relations and a communiqué was issued. In the communiqué, it was stated that first, the U.S. changed from recognizing Taiwan as a part of China to recognizing China as the only legitimate government; second, the U.S. changed from establishing diplomatic relations, making treaties, and stationing troops to Taiwan to breaking off diplomatic relations, abrogating treaties, and

withdrawing troops; third, the U.S.-Taiwan relationship has been transformed from an "official" relationship to a cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relationship. From the communiqué, it can be seen that the U.S. policy toward Taiwan was fundamentally changed, and Taiwan was recognized as a part of China. However, after entering the new era, the U.S. has not followed the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués. The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced that the latest arms sales to Taiwan worth \$95 million, the third since Biden took power [5]. As of 2023, the backlog of orders for U.S. arms sales to Taiwan has reached \$19 billion. Although the U.S. has made it clear on all official occasions that it does not support Taiwan's independence and adheres to the one-China principle, the words and actions of the U.S. government are inconsistent. The friction between the two countries inevitably occurs, and the result is still interference in China's internal affairs. With China's continuous development, the U.S. began to regard China as an imaginary enemy, which made the U.S. even more reluctant to give up Taiwan as an excellent chess piece. Recently, the U.S. even openly said that the Taiwan issue is not China's internal affairs. In 2022, Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives, scurried to visit Taiwan, completely igniting the anger of the Chinese people. In response, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, "If Nancy Pelosi knowingly visits Taiwan, it will be a malicious provocation of China's sovereignty, a brutal interference in China's internal affairs, and will send an extremely dangerous political signal to the outside world [6]." Pelosi's tampering with Taiwan demonstrates to the international community that the U.S. has colluded with the Taiwan authorities to provoke and disrupt the situation in the Taiwan Strait. It also makes people think about what the Taiwan issue means to the U.S.

First, after the Cold War, China was the first "imaginary enemy" of the U.S. in the face of the growing international status of China. In order to achieve the Pacific counterbalance, Taiwan can be used as a pawn to contain China in the Pacific. From Figure 1, it can be seen that China's coastal area to the Pacific Ocean is surrounded by a series of peninsular islands. From north to south are the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese islands, Taiwan Island, the Malay Archipelago, and the Central-South Peninsula, and among this series of islands, only Taiwan Island belongs to China. Taiwan is the only exit to the Pacific Ocean for China, and it has a unique geographic location connecting Northeast and Southeast Asia, with important economic and strategic significance. The U.S. has deployed nearly 100,000 U.S. troops around the islands in the Pacific Ocean, with 70% of them stationed in Japan and South Korea. If Taiwan is garrisoned, then it is a firm blockade of China in the Pacific Ocean. So, the strategic significance of Taiwan is essential to both China and the U.S.



Figure 1: Map of Taiwan and its surrounding islands [7].

Second, whether it is the presidential campaign to canvass for votes or the successive administrations' diversion of the domestic social contradictions in the U.S., the hard-line policy towards China has always been the most customary tactic of the U.S. Government, especially since the U.S. has been in an unstable situation in recent years and has been faced with a lot of internal and external challenges. In the face of the crisis of domestic economic decline, increasing social

polarization and deepening political contradictions, the U.S. has taken the opportunity to create contradictions and disputes in its relations with China, so as to disperse the contradictions within the U.S., maintain the political stability of the U.S., and reduce the negative impact on the decline of the domestic economy. The creation of a crisis in the Taiwan Straits is the main way to create disputes between China and the U.S., which is not in line with the fundamental interests of the people of the two countries and has seriously affected the domestic and international economic development of the U.S. and China.

#### 4. Strategic Conflicts

Strategic interests are fundamental to the development of every country, and the strategic interest of the U.S. today is to dominate the world in order to achieve global hegemony. U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken once said in a speech that "the U.S. faces unprecedented challenges and uncertainty and must be courageous in choosing the right path and regaining dominance of the world to ensure that the U.S. is at the forefront of global competition and leadership [8]."

This paper argues that the ultimate strategic interests of the U.S. are broadly divided into four parts, the first of which is against the Islamic world, including countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. the U.S. has frequently brought wars into the Islamic world in the last 30 years, with the aim of obtaining rich resources and strategic locations in order to come to support the power of the U.S. in the Islamic world. The second part is against the East Asian countries of China and North Korea. The conflict of strategic interests between China and North Korea and the U.S. has never ceased from the East Asian region to the Pacific Ocean, the most representative of which are the North Korean nuclear weapons issue, the South China Sea issue, and the Taiwan issue. The third part is against Orthodox Russia. Although the U.S. defeated the Soviet Union, becoming the world's only superpower, the successor state of the Soviet Union, Russia, still has a very strong military capability. Russia is the world's second largest military power, and the constant conflict between Russia and the U.S. of America has made the relationship between the two countries become increasingly tense. The fourth part is the complete subjugation of the allies - Britain, France, Germany, Japan .... Although these countries are allies of the U.S., they are forced to support the U.S. in many strategic interests, and the people of these countries have become disenchanted with the U.S. For example, French President Macron has repeatedly mentioned that Europe should reduce its dependence on the U.S. and should rely on its own development.

Moreover, the increasingly powerful China is bound to seriously threaten the U.S. domination of the world, because the strategic interests of the two countries are fundamentally different. China's strategic development principles in the international community are peaceful development and mutual benefit. This year marks the tenth year since China proposed the "Belt and Road" initiative, which is aimed at realizing the common development and prosperity of the countries along the route, upholding the spirit of building a community of destiny, and emphasizing the principle of "common business, common construction, and common sharing". It emphasizes the approach of mutual benefit on an equal footing. The Belt and Road Initiative will be an open and inclusive platform for regional cooperation, taking into full consideration the positions, interests, and convenience of all parties, and is the best embodiment of China's international strategy. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, as proposed by Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953, namely, "mutual respect for territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence [9]", are to this day the general consensus of the international community, and have been advocated and led by the Chinese Government. For the conflict of strategic interests between China and the U.S., China and the U.S. should communicate positively and develop peacefully. China-U.S. relations have always been a concern for the international community, and the behavior of negotiation and getting along has an important impact on the development of global peace and stability. For China

and the U.S. to get along effectively, they need to establish a correct relationship with knowledge and inclusiveness to respect each other, and they should appreciate and build trust to promote the negotiation and development of their relationship. As President Xi Jinping said in his speech at a joint welcoming banquet of American friendship groups, "Peaceful coexistence is the basic norm of international relations, and more importantly, it is the bottom line that the two great powers, China and the U.S., must abide by [10]."

## 5. Conclusion

Through the study, it can be found that China and the U.S. have a lot of strategic differences and arguments, including the serious trade disputes caused by the trade war that began in 2018, the increasingly sensitive Taiwan issue due to reasons such as the U.S. officials scurrying to Taiwan, and the different conflicting strategic interests between the two countries, but these conflicts do not impede the attitudes of China and the U.S. to solve the problem because the development of the U.S.-China relationship has never been smooth sailing, and there are still many deep-rooted, structural problems that need to be addressed and solved. The development of China-U.S. relations is closely related to world peace and development. The cooperation and competition between China and the U.S. cannot be resolved and eliminated by the two countries and the international community in a simple way. The respective interests of China and the U.S. must be balanced in order to realize win-win cooperation, while the international community should do its best to create a favorable international environment to jointly promote the development of China-US relations and the realization of world peace. In the face of the challenges of today's world, China and the U.S. need to respect each other, treat each other as equals, and work together to promote global development and prosperity on the basis of cooperation. Only in this way can China-US relations develop in a stable and lasting direction for the benefit of both countries and the world.

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