

THE AMBIANCE OF AMERICAN STATECRAFT ON CHINA UNDER DONALD TRUMP

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Abstract

US President Donald Trump's pattern of diplomacy and American annals of international relations have been shaken due to unpredictability and uncertainty as a diplomatic norm. More critical has been Trump's statecraft on China which seems to reverberate also across the world. Yet, scholarship on the subject matter within international relations studies have not sufficiently been dealt with. This paper therefore argues that Trump's administration statecraft on China revolves towards ensuring the unimpeachable dominance of America on three fronts of trade war, tech war and the Taiwan debacle with China. The paper postulated that the centrality of Trump's administration statecraft on China lies on strengthening America's global standing and position in those three fronts in a transactional sense amidst its precarity to the global liberal international world order.

Keywords: *American statecraft, China's New Diplomacy, , Foreign policy, Trade War, Tariff War*

Introduction

America's foreign policy and international relations *vis-à-vis* its statecraft in relation to China, Russia, and Japan stemmed from various layers of engagement and disengagement alike. But at the centre of the United States (US) statecraft either on rivalry, containment or competition, the most strategic and critical calculus remains US national security. It may be that the combined forces of diplomacy at play often project global dominance and multilateralism as a foreign policy norm and cardinal to America's internationalization and dominance as the world leader. However, America's statecraft on China remains ever unique, dynamic and far more central and cardinal to US foreign policy in harnessing its superpower status. This has been the ebb and flow of American foreign policy nearly eighty years since the 1945 and the surge of Trans-Atlantic cooperation now and still counting within the ambits of US presidential system relative to its international diplomacy agenda.

Yet is quite glaring that American foreign policy new shift and pivot has been directed towards Asia in alignment, containment and even competition in recent years, owing to several factors within the ambit of international relations. The rise of China, its technological advancement, spiral economic growth, militarization and pervasive internationalism and diplomacy have largely contributed to triggered US contentious statecraft on China, the more. While other American presidents have followed suit in prioritizing its foreign policy on containing and checkmating China competitively, President Donald Trump's presidency even in his first coming has been envisaged as transactional, particularly, with Trump's America's First policy. It is understandable that US foreign policy on Asia is predicated on responsiveness majorly on China, whether it is South China Sea, Trade wars, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Chips, technological rivalry, economic competition, diplomatic and global supremacy contest, China remains the centre of gravitas of US foreign policy.

Foot and Waller (2010) for instance argued that given that US and China are the two most pre-eminent states in the international world order, constantly in contest with each other, this tends to predispose China towards seeking to dismantle America's economic, military and cultural preponderance. Mostly, the influx of American companies and businesses in China after the US-led global sanctions against China on the killings at Tiananmen Square – what the Clinton Administration termed the Butchers of Beijing, contributed largely to shaping US-China relations from the 1980s to the present as the most definitive phase of international relations. Cohen (2019) further sees that era as a great leap for China in jumpstarting her economic and military influence around the world. Some scholars of international relations see China posing as a possible formidable force that will eventually overtake America in global dominance and becoming the leader in the unipolar world (Fishman 2005; Snooks 2020); others think otherwise, postulating the continuous dominance of the global world order by the US (Brooks & Wohlforth 2016; Beckley 2018; 2020). This bipolar debate on whether America will ever remain a global superpower or not has continued to dominate studies and research in international relations, and significantly defines Donald Trump's foreign policy on China – seeking to ensure the realization of the former.

For President Donald Trump's statecraft on China, the essence is to create disruption and confrontation, placing America in a far better stead of dominance and control, as opposed to the more corporatist and friendly approaches of the Obama, Bush and Clinton administrations in the past. According to Sun (2025), Trump's administration statecraft and foreign policy on China is precipitated by the zeal to push for trade war, tech war (chips) and the confrontation over Taiwan nay the South China Sea territorial contest. Thus, the statecraft agenda of the Trump's administration is geared towards ensuring the unimpeachable dominance of America on the afore mentioned three (3) counts of trade war, tech war and the Taiwan debacle. The centrality of Trump's administration statecraft on China lies on strengthening America's global standing and position in those three fronts in a transactional sense amidst its precarity to the global liberal international world order.

Therefore, Trump's statecraft on China revolves further on pushing forward his transactional diplomacy and fostering America's dominance of the world, and ultimately creating disruptions, trade wars and tech wars and getting a bargaining chip from Taiwan as part of his foreign policy strategies to keep China at bay and from superseding the US as the world leader. Similarly, Trump's first term indicated this trajectory of combining transactional diplomacy and at the same time being cooperative with China, particularly, withdrawing from sanctioning China on currency manipulation. Beeson (2019) further contended that with the end of Obama's 'pivot to Asia', Trump's foreign policy seems to spin towards transactional diplomacy – prioritizing American interest as topmost, thereby, relegating to the background geopolitical and geo-economics dynamics that tend to define and shape America's statecraft on China, Trans-Pacific and South East Asia relations.

Consequently, this paper explores America's statecraft under President Donald Trump's administration approximation of the global world order with its primacy on China as a launchpad to a comprehensive foreign policy agenda. The paper argues that at the centre of Trump's statecraft on China is the triggering of contestation, competition, confrontation and disruption purposefully geared towards undercutting China's rise even though there are postulations suggesting that such Trump's policies are more helpful to China. The study is therefore hinged on (re)calibrating the epicenter of Trump's administration statecraft on China, nudging the debate and showcasing how Trump's new statecraft on China reshapes and recentre international relations studies and the prevailing disruptive diplomacy at hand in the

fastchanging world order. The paper now proceeds to stipulate theoretical benchmarks in espousing Trump's novel and contemporary statecraft on China.

Literature Review

It needs to be established that Trump's statecraft and its resultant idiosyncrasy is a complete breakaway from the Republican National Committee (RNC) or GOP foreign policy desk of cards. Still, it does not deviate from the objective of its primacy centred on dominance, supremacy and a unipolar superpower. Kissinger (2002) further observed that America's unparalleled ascendancy and preponderant status conditioned the US as an essential component of international stability. However, China's new offensive, new power shifting relationship, the Belt and Road Initiative are purposefully set to counterbalance America's unequalled superpower status and reset global international politics (Lanteigne 2019). It therefore beholds that Trump's Presidency, and his attendant statecraft is hinged on sustaining US supremacy over China and other global world powers. Added to that, Cooper (2017) stressed that Trump's foreign policy and statecraft in respect of China also falls within the purview of protectionism, isolationism and transactional foreign policy as we have come to witnessed Trump's bargain comments on Russian – Ukrainian War (eyeing Ukraine natural resources and minerals), the Panama Canal squabbles, the Israeli-Palestine (Gaza War) – where Trump intend to seize Gaza land, and even similar with issues surrounding Greenland and Denmark.

Further, literature on Trump's statecraft and foreign policy on China is diverse as it is broad in appropriating all the contours of statecraft and foreign policy dynamics of the administration which is transaction in a sense and its diplomatic language often sounds off as bombastic. Tao (2017) observed that despite the cases of mixed bags in Trump's foreign policy on China, diplomatic relations between the two on trade, Taiwan and technology are bound to end in a consensus as demonstrated in Trump's first term between 2017 and 2020. This somehow convulse Trump's statecraft in terms of oscillating between transactional diplomacy and multipolar or bipolar cooperation between US and China as global leaders in contemporary world. It is in view of this line of thought that some observers like Blackwell (2019) argued that Trump's statecraft and foreign policy particularly those focusing on Trans-Pacific relations are more beneficial and advantageous than they seem or appear to be – going by Trump's theatrics and foreign policy unpredictability.

One of the key strategic concerns on the Sino-American relations has been the issue of one-China policy and the US diplomatic recognition of Taiwan as an independent entity. Here also, President Trump, unlike other American presidents' hand-in-hand with members of US Congress has been unpredictable and pushing out some transactional form of diplomacy here and there. Chen (2019) also maintained that notwithstanding Trump's picky approaches on Indo-Pacific, US interest is to expand its power and checkmate the People's Republic of China. In the same token, Cooper (2017) stipulated that there has not been too much departure from the Republican policy on Taiwan by the Trump's administration, considering his statecraft centred on China relative to Taiwan – so long as Taiwan fulfils the transactional aspect of the diplomatic aspirations in military, arms and hardware deals, technological and trade engagements with the United States.

Overall, scholarship and literature on Trump's statecraft on China do not resonate a coherent conversation or foreign policy agenda in the processes and procedures necessary or capable of harnessing a unified thematic focus for international relations or diplomacy research. As studies have shown, Trump's statecraft approach on China could somehow aligned with GOP/Republican foreign policy on China (Cooper 2017), or transactional and beneficial to America (Blackwell 2019), or rather be a definite alignment of Sino-American relations (Tao

2019), and largely sustaining America's preponderant superpower and dominance (Kissinger 2002). All these point to the unpredictability of Trump's foreign policy and statecraft on China even though there are basic aspect of consensus on how Trump's navigate the China agenda in the interest of the United States.

Methodological Scope

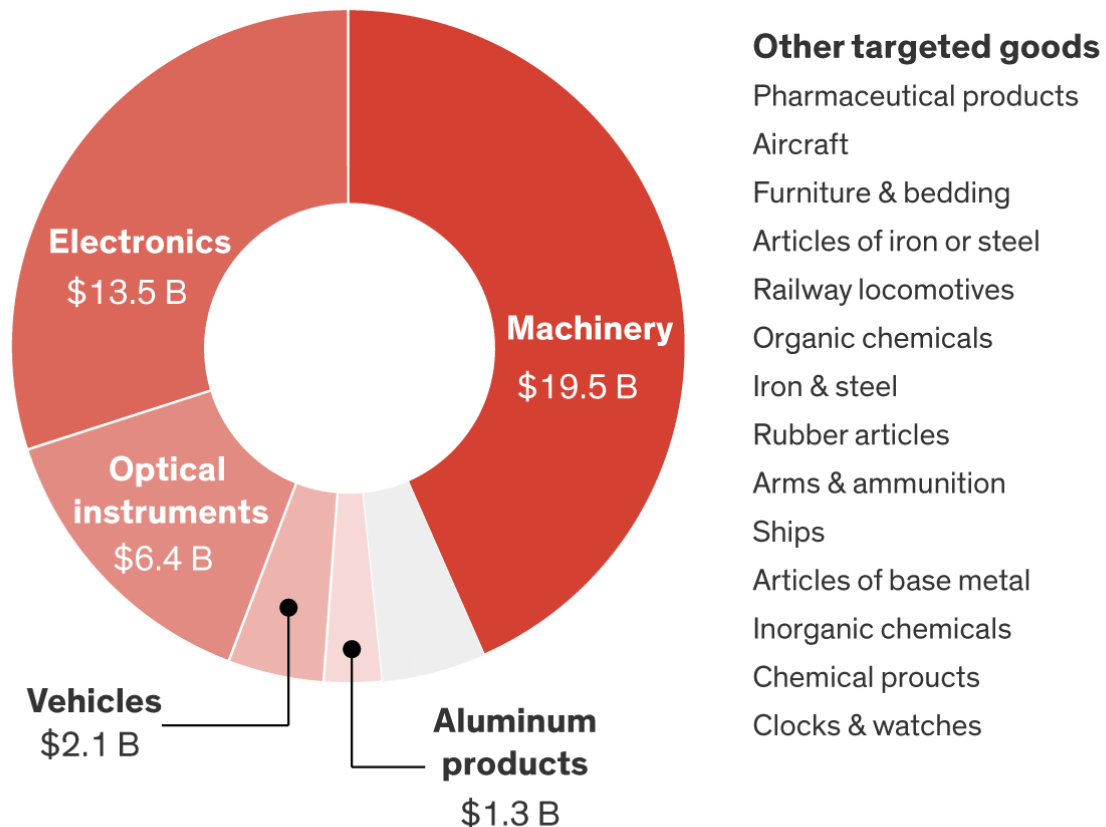
Unravelling research methodology in studying international relations has remain a great puzzle over the years. Still, as Milliken (1999) posited, grasping discourse as processes that connects contexts and social and diplomatic processes in today's world. This is likewise a workable template, taking cognizance of the way and manner discursive interactions of power and diplomacy, as exemplified by President Donald Trump are at the centre of international relations, could as well form the fulcrum of significant theorization. For this study, I adopted discursive interactions, policy statements, US foreign policy agenda and excavation of statecraft trajectories with regards to China, as well, explored how all these processes and methodological scopes help to illuminate Trump's statecraft on China.

DISCUSSION – Inside Trump's Statecraft on China

It can be stated that there is no clear-cut Trump's foreign policy or statecraft on China that is definitively outlined or fixated as an agenda relative to China. However, Trump's Statecraft as highlighted above in the preceding sections is defined by the sustenance and continuation of America's preponderant positioning and status. Critically, it can be assumed that this remains Trump's first and topmost stragety to contain China in all fronts. Second, sensing that China is potentially positioned to overtake US if nothing is done to circumvent that prospect from happening. Here, Trump's statecraft whether on tariff, trade war, tech war, South China, Indo-Pacific, Taiwan and other critical of US national security interest, the overall goal is calibrating all these, channeling the basic objectives towards strengthening US global superpower dominance and ensuring China's rise to becoming the indisputable world's leader is upended.

The 1300 Chinese products targeted by the Trump administration

Value of Imports from China, 2017*

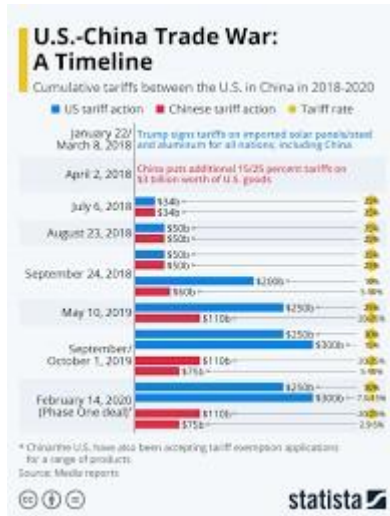


Data: Office of United States Trade Representative

For instance, on the Tariff brouhaha, Trump's agenda here is to slam China with heavy tariff – intended to wedge off China from US market and reshape China's economy in which the PRC loses a large of its global market share – by losing the US market. By using uncertainty and unpredictability, Trump has kept the Chinese unsettled for the most part even as the US government announced the tariff this week. Most times, Trump uses delay tactics and uncertainty as a diplomatic strategy for bargaining and negotiation as well. In tariff, Trump's statecraft agenda is to reset the trade deficit between the US and China, disrupt the advantages the PRC currently hold and bring the Asian giant to the negotiating table. With the politics of tariff, Trump appears to be reshaping the world and the global economy in his terms in which China is the ultimate target.

Trump's statecraft objective is also to deploy several layers of contending issues from tariff, trade wars, tech wars, Taiwan, South China Sea among others to deflate China's rising influence around the world. This pattern fits into Trump's disruptive and unpredictable statecraft in view of America's relationship with China. It might be argued that within international relations circle, this method could undercut the global international order that has lasted since 1945 and the creation of United Nations (UN) from the League of Nations. Yet, Trump's understanding of multilateralism stemmed from his views that such institutionalization has taken power from

poor power to corporate elites, specifically, the liberal left. Trump's America's First foreign policy agenda, and the ensuing statecraft on China is premeditated to rupture such global institutionalization and scaling up America's preponderant global standing.



Consequences of Trumps War on China in International Relations

It is also not out of place to argue or submit that Trump's statecraft on China has ripple effect across the world in various ramifications. Further, it cannot be disputed that such statecraft on China also affects Africa and other countries in the Global South from the World Trade Organization, disruption of global markets, undercutting multilateralism and transnational engagement. This has been the greatest concerns in today's diplomacy and international relations, mostly, with the pushing of tariff or what Trump called Liberation Day for America. Trump's statecraft on China sort of rejuvenates cold war old-style trade barriers has impacts on many trading partners of the US in unimaginable ways.

Conclusion

Statecraft whether in diplomacy, international relations or governmental circles remains the cardinal point or a guidepost of how foreign policy evolves and tend to shape outcomes of international policies. In the case of US President, Donald Trump's statecraft on China, the patterns have been unpredictability and uncertainty, disruption, competition and centralizing American agenda of dominance as a superpower remains forthwith. It is therefore paramount to add that Trump's statecraft is premised on protectionism, using the frontiers of trade war, tariffs, tech war and the disputed island of Taiwan as a springboard to keep America's preponderant global positioning afloat. Another side to the craft in view of Trump's foreign policy agenda is to prevent China from subsuming America as the global world leader. This is the pertinent US statecraft on China under President Trump both now and in the future.

Another salient point to make is that the impact of US statecraft on China does not only resonates with China but across the world in various dimensions. While Trump's statecraft, mostly on foreign policy affects every nation on the planet, Trump's statecraft on China, pitching the biggest global economies and world powers against each other, is most likely to become a defining factor around the world and how international relations is shaped in the nearest future.

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