**Strategic Distrust Between the United States and China**

**What this distrust looks like today, and both the short-term and long-term causes for its emergence.**

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Ever since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the United States of America and China have seen their bilateral relationship become increasingly strained. The countries have slowly, but surely, begun to develop a mutual strategic distrust for one another. This distrust is significant, as the United States and China have the world’s largest and second largest economies, respectively, and also consequentially have the largest and second largest political influence in the affairs of the current world. Strategic distrust can, over time, produce a self-fulfilling prophecy of antagonistic relations that are essentially zero sum on both sides, to the severe harm of all parties and actors concerned (Lieberthal and Wang, 39). Currently, the two countries’ opinions regarding their economic policies, security threats faced by the advancement of technology, the developing ideals of human rights, and the promotion of democracy around the world are quite polarized and thus clash with one another. The reasons for the strategic distrust between the United States and China differ, along with both of their individual perspectives; yet, both countries face ideological tensions based off of their mutual distrust for one another’s different political systems, the pressure of immense, arguably hegemonic global influence, and a historical record of mounting tensions that draws back to the age of Western imperialism in China.

The frictions between the two countries have also stemmed from their more individualized understandings of the other’s motives. Currently, the tension between the two powers can be seen, from China’s perspective, as due to the fact that they believe their nation has “ascended to be a first-class power in the world and should be treated as such” (Lieberthal and Wang, 8-9). The Chinese have experienced an immense increase in their national pride as their global influence has become stronger over the past few decades. From their perspective, the United States’ foreign policy strategy in China is viewed as primarily aimed towards Westernizing and dividing the country, as the Americans feel threatened by China’s immense growth at the time of their own arguable economic and political decline.

In recent years, the United States have expressed an increasing support for political activists and figures, such as the Dalai Lama, Liu Xiaobo, and Ai Wei Wei, whose efforts in China attempt to challenge the current system, and even break away parts of China from the mainland and call for fundamental changes in the Chinese governance system (Lieberthal and Wang, 12). The Chinese view the Dalai Lama as a political figure who threatens the state by trying to separate Tibet from the rest of China, and both Ai Wei Wei and Liu Xiaobo as a state criminals for advocating new political systems and calling the authority of the Chinese Communist Party into question. On the other hand, the Americans highly respect all of these figures as brave human rights activists, peacemakers and revolutionary, visionary individuals, and in the case of Liu Xiaobo, a deserving Nobel Peace Prize recipient, despite the fact that he was awarded the prize almost primarily for challenging China’s top leadership. The Chinese typical understanding of world history in terms of the United States and their support of international human rights standards has become extremely cynical, as they believe American politicians are true believers of the “law of the jungle” and their promotion of democracy and human rights are in reality power policy tools to achieve the goals of power politics (Lieberthal and Wang, 11). In addition to expressing support for these controversial figures, the United States has also pushed the Chinese to recognize climate change and develop greener technologies. The Chinese view of America’s promotion of important environmental issues is also widely pessimistic, as the Chinese believe that climate change is a Western conspiracy meant to prevent China and other developing nations from reaching the level of development of the United States. Specifically, by creating the impression that climate change is primarily anthropogenic and that the solution lies in reducing carbon emissions, the Chinese believe that Americans truly seek to make profits by selling their advanced, low-carbon technologies and constraining the rise of upcoming economies like China’s that are still working to vastly expand production and infrastructure development to meet their own needs in transitioning out of poverty and expanding their middle classes (Lieberthal and Wang, 16). The Chinese view all of the United States’ combined efforts to influence their society politically and economically as driven by the fact that the United States is itself in decline, and itself desires to protect its position as number one from an upcoming and rising power. From a Chinese perspective, the American financial disorder, alarming deficit and unemployment rate, slow economic recovery, political polarization, lack of competence and confidence on the global stage, and decrease in the size of its GDP are evidence that the United States, once the most developed and prosperous nation in the world, is in decline. Conflict arises from this fact, as the Chinese see all of America’s efforts to promote its political ideals, new technologies, and its economic policies as attempts to maintain this position, not attempts to better the rest of the developing world.

From an American politician’s perspective, the current strategic distrust of China is not as influential as the Chinese distrust of the United States. The majority of decision makers in the United States essentially believe that it is not only feasible, but also desirable, for the United States to develop a constructive long-term relationship with China (Lieberthal and Wang, ix). However, distrust for China arises in the United States, stemming from the fact that American policymakers realize that China thinks in terms of a long-term zero sum game as governing the relationship between the two nations. This long-term zero sum game refers to the fact that the Chinese believe that a gain for either the United States or China equals a loss for the other, meaning that the Chinese could see the process of advancing their own long-term interests in terms of weakening the United States (Lieberthal and Wang, 22). Additionally, the United States fears the potential harm that the mercantilist policies of the Chinese government could cause, and the potential for this harm to threaten the chances for American economic revival. The United States government, especially following the financial crisis of 2008 and the increasingly out of control federal deficit, has become sensitive to Chinese economic policies that impose direct costs on the United States’ economy. These policies include “intellectual property theft, keeping the values of the RMB below market levels, serious constraints on market access in China, and China’s 2010-11 restrictions on exports of rare earth metals, which appeared to be strategically designed to acquire sensitive foreign technologies” (Lieberthal and Wang, x). Not only do the American’s distrust the Chinese economic motives and policies, but they also distrust the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. The PLA is viewed with fear and suspicion, as there is an unquestionable lack of transparency in China’s military plans and doctrines, and at the same time an increasing scope and persistence of China-base cyber attacks against the United States’ government, military, and private sector targets (Lieberthal, x).

The United States and China have an intense distrust for each other’s political systems and ideologies, stemming from fundamental attribution biases. These fundamental attribution biases encourage each country to view their own actions and motives and those of their similar allies as fundamentally good in nature, while viewing the actions of the countries that are inherently different, or essentially each other’s actions, as fundamentally ill-willed, threatening, and even evil. From an American perspective, democratic political systems naturally understand each other better, while authoritarian systems are inherently unstable, as they are more prone to blaming other nations for their own domestic discontent. Additionally, the United States views authoritarian systems as intrinsically less transparent and difficult to trust, as judging their sincerity and intentions is more complex and multi-faceted. This viewpoint is due in part to the fact that authoritarian systems are also seen to naturally worry more about their own domestic stability, which makes them willing to encourage extreme nationalism while creating international crises and focusing their populace’s attention away from the problems at home (Lieberthal and Wang, ix). The United States also condemns China for its communist system because they perceive the supposedly inherent ill will of the leadership to cause these leaders to accept, and even promote, the acceptance of domestic human rights violations. At the same time, the Chinese view all of America’s actions in terms of promoting human rights and democracy around the world as consistently hostile and designed to undermine Beijing’s authority and legitimacy. Both the negative views each country fosters towards the other stems from the fact that the countries cannot accept their differing political systems and traditions, which has brewed distrust ever since the founding of the People’s Republic of China by Mao Zedong in 1949.

The effect of fundamental attribution bias in exacerbating the tensions between the two ideologically distinct nations also causes each side to perceive the other’s actions as more strategically motivated, carefully designed, and internally coordinated than is actually the case (Lieberthal and Wang, 36). While the economic activities of China’s state-owned enterprises around the world are viewed by the United States as suspicious parts of the Chinese leadership grand strategy, these economic decisions are in reality mostly driven by commercial interests and made independent from one another, not in relation to a grand Chinese scheme. Similarly, the Chinese view American NGOs, private foundations, media, and church involvement in China as politically motivated, and even sponsored by the United States government and CIA. Even though the United States government truly has little, if any at all, influence over the specific actions of these actors, the government is held responsible in the eyes of the Chinese people for the behavior of American private citizens and groups that many Chinese view to be detrimental to the nation. Although the fundamental attribution bias has always been present and a motivating factor behind each the United States’ and China’s actions towards one another, the biases are becoming more of a stronger factor in shaping opinions and actions as the perceived power gap between the two countries narrows. In both countries, there is anticipation, both slight and influential, of China surpassing the United States in the next few decades as the world’s largest economy and potential global hegemon, or regulator of global affairs. As China is more of a current perceived threat to the United States than ever before, the United States increasingly acts upon its fundamental attribution bias to pit itself against the rising nation that portends to surpass its global influence. Fundamental attribution bias is also more prominently used to guide China’s perspective for the same reason: as the United States is the single, most significant roadblock to China becoming the most powerful state, the actions of the United States are viewed in a more negative light than ever before.

Although the tensions between the United States and China have been aggravated in recent years by China’s perceived increased power and ability to take the United States’ place as world hegemon, technology and security crises, and debates over current issues stemming from different political ideologies, such as how to address human rights violations and the impending climate change, the distrust between the two countries has been escalating for more than one-hundred years. Even before China became a communist nation in 1949, Western intrusion was viewed with heavy amounts of disdain and resentment. Although the United States was not the sole power with imperialistic intentions in China near the end of the nineteenth century, it was one of the most dominant and pervasive. The Chinese foreign resentment can be traced back to the Western “invaders” clashing head on with China’s traditional order (Fairbank, 163). Near the middle of the 18th century, British and other foreign imperialists began to exploit China for its opium market, by smuggling opium illegally into the country, where the market for this opium became immensely large. British, American, and even Chinese merchants and officials openly connived at this illegal trade. When the Chinese tried to put an end to the problem by destroying smuggled crates of opium before they could reach the Chinese distributors, the British stationed in China persuaded their government to allow them to attack and preserve this profitable trade. The Opium War of 1840-1842 consisted of clashes between the British and the Chinese, which eventually paved way for the British to dominate and impose a series of “unequal treaties” with the Chinese. Not surprisingly, in China “the opium trade remains a classic symbol of the Western commercial imperialism… foreign greed and violence demoralizing and exploiting an inoffensive people” (Fairbank, 163).

The principle of the foreign illegal opium trade in China was exploitive enough and reason for the Chinese to resent the foreign influence; yet, the effects of the unequal treaties following the Opium Wars were even more devastating. Both the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and the treaty following a second conflict involving both the British and French and signed in Tientsin (1858) were loosely enforced, initially. Even though the treaties were initially not enforced, they were “signed as between equal and sovereign powers,” yet, were “actually quite unequal in that China was placed against her will in a weaker position, open to the inroads of Western commerce and its attendant culture” (Fairbank, 165). The “unequal treaties” not only put China at a lesser position economically after losing the wars, but also placed China in a hopeless place diplomatically by taking away important responsibilities from the Chinese government. Additionally, the treaties, once enforced, established a strong principle and legal system of extraterritoriality in China, by which foreign merchants and missionaries, their goods and property, and to some extent their Chinese employees and converts, became immune to Chinese authority.

Over time, extraterritoriality became a powerful tool for opening China because it encouraged activity and investment there; however, it was a clear impairment of China’s sovereignty and a great handicap to China’s self defense against Western exploitation (Fairbank, 168). In addition, these “unequal treaties” also imposed a treaty tariff, by which its low rates prevented the Chinese from protecting their native industries, and numerous treaty ports under foreign control in China. Currently, the influx of Western goods, ways, ideas, and influence during the century of the “unequal treaties” is indiscriminately condemned by Chinese patriots, who term all Sino-foreign contact of this period almost without exception as “imperialistic” (Fairbank, 168). The blanket and all-encompassing use of this term is indicative of the fact that the West violated China’s sovereignty and interests by expanding into China. As Americans played a large role in this expansion, it becomes possible to pinpoint some of the first origins of the tensions and distrust between China and the West, and thus China and the United States, to the conflicts and hardships brought by the “unequal treaties.” As the United States was one of the first imperialist powers trying to exploit China to advance its own interests, this did not start the Chinese-American relationship out on a trustful footing.

Following the “unequal treaties,” from the years 1860-1900, China was opened up to increasing foreign commercial exploitation and military endeavor (Fairbank, 201). During this time period, thousands of missionaries from the West, particularly from the United States, travelled to China to convert the “backwards” people. Despite the enormous number of missionaries and resources sent to China, fewer than 60,000 Christian converts were made (Fairbank, 202). The influence of the Western missionaries was highly disruptive to the old Chinese society, although it was eminently helpful to the Chinese people. China was not destined to become a Christian nation; but, the influence of mission schools and hospitals, and of missionary ideals and activities in emphasizing the importance of the common man, initiating women’s education, and assisting in charitable tasks, must be considered. Although it can be argued that these works were inherently good and helpful for the Chinese people, it can also be supported that the “good works of the missionaries… were carried on by self-righteous foreigners under the protection of extraterritorial privileges backed up by gunboats” (Fairbank, 202). This pessimistic point of view shows that the Chinese resented a lot of the foreign “charity” in their nation, as much of the works did not come across as “charitable” as they did forceful and frightening. This also illustrates that the Opium Wars and unequal treaties had profound effects on Chinese opinion towards the activities of foreigners in the nation, particularly foreigners who sought to push their way of life upon the Chinese society. This foundation for the Chinese-American relationships is clearly problematic, as it shows that the Americans initially viewed the Chinese as inferior people that needed to be saved, while the Chinese initially viewed the Americans as forceful imperialists who dominated the Chinese society at the expense of the China’s own interests.

Chinese resentment of Western interference was truly illustrated in 1900 by a secret society called the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, or the Boxers. In the legation quarter, or center of foreign diplomacy and activity, in Beijing, violence erupted after a German murdered a peaceful Boxer. This led to a joint Chinese effort by the Chinese government and the Boxers to trap the foreigners in the legation quarter (Thompson, “Righteous and Harmonious Fists”). However, eventually word of the conflict reached the international community and an international fighting force was assembled and sent to Beijing to take back the legation quarter. The international fighting force was able to scatter the Boxers and the other soldiers, which led to the Chinese defeat and extremely harsh punishments that followed, as the Chinese were forced to pay indemnities to each country affected (Thompson, “Righteous and Harmonious Fists”). This conflict not only illustrated a severe downturn of the Chinese dynastic cycle, as the last Chinese dynasty collapsed only a few years afterwards, but also showed the domestic resentment of foreigners by the Chinese people. Additionally, the fact that the Chinese lost this conflict and were in turn forced to pay large sums of money to countries which they were essentially already paying huge sums to for their foreign exploitation and incursion, led to increased Chinese resentment of foreigners, particularly Westerners, and particularly Americans. Consequentially, the Chinese did not trust foreigners to consider Chinese interests as they made their own decisions to profit.

One of the two most significant events for determining international relations in the twentieth century was World War I. The conflict engaged the world’s powers in unprecedented levels of military fighting, entangled alliance systems, loss of life, and international involvement. Yet, in terms of shaping the bilateral relationship between the United States and China to be one of distrust, the peace treaty at Versailles following the end of the war was extremely significant. United States’ President Woodrow Wilson was extremely determined to establish a League of Nations following the war, in which some of the world’s major powers could interact peacefully and use the notion of collective security to prevent the outbreak of another devastating conflict. Wilson realized that, in order to be most effective, the League required the membership of as many powerful and influential nations as possible. Therefore, Wilson was willing to make significant sacrifices to ensure that certain nations joined the League of Nations. In order to get the Japanese to join the League of Nations, Wilson had to deny self-determination to the Chinese people by agreeing to the continuation of the Japanese occupation of China’s Shandong Peninsula (Thompson, “The May Fourth Movement”). This outraged Chinese students and intellectuals, who started a revolution on May 4th, as they believed it was time to reverse the Chinese dynastic cycle. These Chinese intellectuals who started the May Fourth Movement split into two camps: communists, and nationalist, revolutionary followers of Sun Yat-sen. This movement was extremely significant in leading to even more Chinese distrust and resentment towards the United States, as it was Wilson’s actions that initially sparked the conflict by denying the Chinese their rights in favor of the Japanese. In this movement, the Chinese intellectuals brought new cultural ideas of science, democracy, and patriotism together, commonly regarded as Western ideals, into an ironically anti-Imperialist program.

From the United States’ perspective, American interests in China were initially focused on the desire to find a new market for our goods and a place to which to spread our Christian, democratic ideals. This can be seen in the actions of the United States as American politicians pushed to pass the Open Door Notes. The Open Door Treaty was expressed as policy statements and in bilateral treaties many times after 1900, but was not formally stated in a legal form binding on all parties involved until 1922. In the first Open Door Note, devised under the McKinley administration, the United States asserted its right to trade in China (Thompson, “The Panama Canal”). The doctrine developed also attacked the expansion of international spheres of influence in China through its two main tenets: the integrity of China and the equal treatment of all the foreigners there (Thompson, “The Panama Canal”). Viewed cynically, this doctrine of China’s integrity was a device to prevent other powers, particularly Russia, from taking over areas of China and then excluding the United States from those areas. The Open Door Notes show that the Americans disregarded China’s interests in favor of their own, commercial interests, and primarily desired to retain their influence in the nation at any cost, no matter if they had to deny China the opportunity to make its own sovereign decisions about which countries with which it wanted to be involved. This American preference, to dominate Chinese society and affairs despite the costs associated, led the Chinese to not only resent the United States as they had resented Westerners since the nineteenth century, but also led the Chinese to distrust American motives for their actions in China, despite how potentially harmless these actions seemed.

Like the global war that preceded it, World War II was more deadly, destructive, all encompassing, and involved than any previous war. In determining relations between the United States and China, this war was pivotal. The war was a two-front war, fought in Europe to destroy the menaces of Hitler and Nazi Germany, and fought in the Pacific primarily by the United States to defeat the Japanese. The Japanese invaded Manchuria and other parts of Southeast Asia in attempt to establish themselves as a dominant imperial power in the region. At the same time that the Chinese were struggling to fight off the Japanese forces and advances, they were also struggling internally against each other, as Mao Zedong and his communist followers challenged the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-sek. In the Pacific front, the Americans’ first priority during World War II was the defeat of the Japanese; however, this was closely followed by the “elevation of China under Chiang Kai-sek and the Kuomintang Party to great power status, which required establishing Chiang’s control in China, a control that was contested by the communists under Mao Tse-tung and by the Japanese, who held most of the China coast” (Ambrose, 37). Although Chiang was corrupt, inefficient, and dictatorial, he was also friendly to the West, and the United States hoped that his Kuomintang party would bring China to the modern world community as both a market and producer of raw materials. The United States encouraged Chiang to reform and liberalize the Kuomintang party; but, he did not have the desire for reform, and even if he did desire a change, as a weak ruler he did not have the capacity to put any sort of reform into motion. Even though Chiang seemed hopeless as a leader, the United States kept money and military aid flowing to China during World War II because the alternative to Chiang was Mao Zedong and the communists, whom Americans regarded with horror. Yet, the aid that Americans provided to Chiang Kai-sek was not enough, as the communists were able to forcefully take power following World War I in 1949. This led to an uproar amongst the American population, as many people thought that if Truman’s administration and the Congress would only have sent more money to China, the United States could have prevented another nation from falling to communism. The shift of power from the nationalists to the communists in China was immensely significant for the state of tension and distrust surrounding the bilateral relations between the United States and China. The United States feared the expansion of communism above all, and the communists highly resented Western democratic ideals. This shift in regime type pitted the two nations against one another ideologically, especially as the anti-communist sentiment in the United States reached paramount levels under Truman’s administration, due to the influence of George Kennan’s containment policy, the Truman Doctrine, and the popularity of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Following World War II, the Korean War also intensified the tensions between the United States and China by causing the states to challenge each other via a proxy war for the sake of containing and liberating, or advancing communism in Korea. In June of 1950, the North Koreans violated the border set up by the United Nations and crossed the 38th parallel into South Korean territory. The day after the invasion, President Truman responded by formally extending the Truman Doctrine to the Pacific and pledging the United States to military intervention against any further expansion of communist rule in Asia (Ambrose and Brinkley, 117). Initially, Truman sent only money and weapons to aid the South Koreans after receiving approval from the United Nations and ensuring Stalin that his desire was to contain, not conquer, North Korea (Ambrose and Brinkley, 118). However, the South Koreans begun to experience dangerous losses and large amounts of territory fell to the North Koreans, so Truman saw no other option to send in actual United States troops to Korea from Japan. On September 27th, 1950, General Macarthur and his troops made significant gains in reclaiming territory from the North Koreans; in response, the joint chiefs of the army ordered him to conduct military operations in North Korea, which shifted the American attitude in the war from containment to liberation, despite Chinese warnings that they would get involved and send troops if the Americans crossed the border into North Korea (Ambrose and Brinkley, 118). The Americans believed that the Chinese were making empty threats, so Macarthur invaded North Korea on two widely separated routes. When Macarthur advanced into North Korea, the Chinese poured thousands of volunteer soldiers into the county and scattered Macarthur’s troops. As the Chinese took action and changed the entire dynamics of the war, Truman became aware that attacking China was the only possible way to emerge from Korea, but feared attacking Korea for the inevitable Soviet support that would go to the Chinese and leave the Americans helpless. Instead, Truman expedited war mobilization, reintroduced selective service, and expanded containment policy; eventually, the frontlines began to stabilize around the 18th parallel and President Eisenhower was able to sign an armistice in 1953.

The war remains significant because some Chinese leaders hold the view that it is the United States rather than North Korea that should be held more responsible for the current tensions on the Korean peninsula, which emphasizes their negative image of American imperialist tendencies (Ambrose and Brinkley, 17). North Korea has also become an extremely key player in the current international community, and it can be partially attributed to the Korean War that it is in China’s best interests to help North Korea maintain its domestic stability. Similar to the events of 1950, China believes that American pressures on the North Korean government are aimed at undermining North Korea or overthrowing it at China’s expense. The tensions between China and the United States where North Korea is concerned rose out of the Korean War of 1950, and are currently some of the most heated tensions between the two nations.

Following the removal of United States’ troops from Korea in 1953, the Nationalist Chinese began a series of bombing raids in American-built planes, against mainland shipping and ports (Ambrose and Brinkley, 141). The communists struck back in 1955 by bombing the Tachen Islands, and then mounting their weapons opposite Quemoy and Matsu. Although this issue was not initially alarming to the United States, President Eisenhower was determined to hold Quemoy and Matsu, as he believed they were essential to the defense of Formosa, which served as an “anti-Communist barrier consisting of the insular and peninsular position in the Western Pacific” (Ambrose and Brinkley, 141). In order to avoid what Eisenhower saw as the inevitable catastrophic consequences of Indonesia, Malaya, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma falling to communism, he essentially asked for a “blank check” from Congress so that he could take appropriate military action against the Chinese if necessary. When the Congress approved Eisenhower’s request, a major war scare ensued that was crucial in developing the distrust between the United States and China, as there was no other time in the Cold War when the United States came so close to launching preemptive action. Eisenhower did not act against the Chinese; however, it was still extremely significant that the Secretary of State, Dulles, gave a speech on March 20th in which he referred to the Chinese as an “acute and imminent threat, … dizzy with success” and he compared their “aggressive fanaticism” with Hitler’s by stating that they were “more dangerous and provocative of war” than Hitler (Ambrose and Brinkley, 142). This extremely harsh rhetoric, which seems to be emotional and aggressive enough to be used during wartime, is illustrative of the intense distrust that the Americans held for the Chinese.

The final long-reaching and significant cause of the escalated distrust between the United States and China is the Vietnam War. The United States was involved in Vietnam indirectly since the early 1950s, as they provided monetary aid and weaponry to the French troops who were assisting the South Vietnamese, and later to the Vietnamese themselves. But, Kennedy wanted to further United States’ involvement in Vietnam, because he thought it would help the American international reputation by showing American interest in the third world, demonstrating conclusively that the United States lived up to commitments of the SEATO Treaty, and preventing the Chinese, who were supporting the Viet Cong forces, from making significant territorial gains and spreading communism throughout Asia (Ambrose and Brinkley, 192). When the North Vietnamese army invaded South Vietnam, the United States sent troops to Vietnam to aid the South Vietnamese. However, no American politician or citizen could anticipate how tragic, destructive, and endless the war would become. The war was the first televised war in American history, and as American citizens saw the horrible ravaged battle scenes and destruction, and what seemed like their inevitable loss, displayed right before their eyes on television screens across the county, public opinion turned against the war. Eventually, in 1974, Richard Nixon was able to campaign for President of the United States on the promise to end the war in Vietnam. In 1975, the war ended with surrender, and the United States lost an extremely significant conflict for the first time. To the Chinese, who had fought on the side of the North Vietnamese guerilla troops, this victory signaled the beginning of the decline of the American “empire,” and their own emergence as a significant player in world politics. Additionally, both the Vietnam and Korean Wars pitted the Americans against the forces of communism, and the United States did not emerge fully victorious either time. This caused further ideological tensions to emerge, and has led to extremely long-standing distrust between the United States and China on the basis of these ideological struggles.

Although the strategic distrust that exists between the United States and China has become much more evident in the past few decades as China has emerged as a powerful force in international relations and the United States has been experiencing an arguable economic decline, the distrust has been steadily building up in the bilateral relationship between the nations for more than one-hundred years. Currently the strategic distrust is due largely to the fact that fundamental attribution bias leads both the United States and China to distrust each other due to their different political ideologies. It is also based on the fact that China sees every move by the United States as calculated to Westernize and Democratize the country, while the United States sees the moves made by China as attempts to benefit at the expense of the United States. Currently, the strategic distrust between the two nations manifests itself in tensions around economic policy, human rights violations, technology and security concerns, and territorial disputes. This distrust can be attributed to long-term causes involving the foreign exploitation of China for its opium market in the nineteenth century, the atmosphere of resentment created by the unequal treaties, and the clash between American democracy and Chinese communism evident in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnamese War.

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