

The Failures of the ‘Failure of Engagement’ with China

One core element in the current narrative in Washington about China as a challenger to the so-called U.S.-dominated liberal “rules-based order” is that the previous U.S. engagement strategy, pursued mainly from the Clinton administration on, has failed. The “engagement failed” idea rests on two empirical claims and one (mostly unspoken) counterfactual claim. The first empirical claim is that engagement was designed to create a Chinese commitment to the U.S.-dominated liberal order, but basically failed to change China’s preferences toward the international norms and institutions that constituted this order. The second empirical claim is that engagement was designed to liberalize, even democratize, China’s political system, and as such has failed. The counterfactual claim is that, had the United States never adopted the engagement strategy in the first place, the United States would be better off today because it would have been better prepared to compete with or contain China earlier.

In this article, I argue that the first empirical claim exaggerates the degree to which there has been a singular U.S.-dominated liberal order and misses the considerable diversity in China’s policies toward international norms and institutions. The second empirical claim excessively simplifies a more sophisticated causal argument developed by proponents of engagement in the U.S. government. As for the counterfactual argument, opponents of engagement fail to consider other equally plausible alternative histories.

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OrderS, Not Order

The first empirical claim in the “engagement has failed” argument is that engagement failed to turn China into a supporter of the U.S.-dominated liberal world order. Instead, China has become a revisionist state. This is increasingly a bipartisan claim in Washington. Trump adviser Michael Pillsbury claims: “Trade and technology were supposed to lead to a convergence of Chinese and Western views on questions of regional and global order. They haven’t.”¹ Aaron Friedberg, a former advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney has noted, “I would say China is now quite clearly a revisionist power. It seeks to change important aspects of the existing order in Asia and increasingly the wider world, as well.”² Former Under Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration, Michèle Flournoy, concludes that a rising China is “willing to unilaterally change the status quo and violate the rules-based international order.”³ Ely Ratner, a former adviser to Vice President Joe Biden agreed with the Trump administration’s formal declaration that China is a revisionist state: “I think the *National Security Strategy* and the *National*

The claim that China constitutes a revisionist challenge suffers from a number of problems.

Defense Strategy basically get the narrative right ... that the integrationist agenda has largely failed, that China’s a revisionist power.”⁴

This claim that China constitutes a revisionist challenge to a singular U.S. liberal order, however, suffers from a number of conceptual and empirical problems. Due to the limits of space, these problems cannot be fully explored here. But the bottom line is that this claim uncritically assumes the existence and persistence of a singular U.S.-dominated liberal

world order. And, as much of the specialist empirical work on China’s involvement in different international institutions suggests, the claim also oversimplifies the variety of ways that China approaches so-called international order.

In essence, the dominant narrative posits that after WWII the United States instituted a set of normatively consistent institutions, rules, and expectations that spread globally. The content of this order more or less stresses market-oriented economic ties, resolving disputes through international legal processes, and promoting political and civil liberties. But empirically, this is an ahistorical caricature of the timing, direction, and content of the rules, norms and institutions that currently regulate inter-state relations. The conventional wisdom gives too much agency to the United States (and not enough, for example, to the Europeans),⁵ ignores the many instances where the United States has opposed post-WWII international institutions and rules, and exaggerates the consistency across

extant norms and institutions. What many think is a U.S.-led liberal *world* order is in some issue areas mainly a transatlantic order.⁶

“Order” can be thought of as an emergent property of the interaction of myriad actors in a system. In the current international system, that means norms, rules, institutions and practices are the products of the behaviors of everything from state bureaucracies to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to multinational corporations (MNCs) to intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to ideas entrepreneurs. Given this wide variety of actors with different identities and interests, the normative and institutional outcomes of their interactions are bound to be complex, even contradictory. We should expect to see “issue-specific orders” where the key norms and institutions that regulate state behavior today vary depending on the issue area—territory, arms control, trade, finance, information, environment, political rights, and social rights, among others. Across many of these orders, the dominant norms and institutions are sufficiently different, sometimes even contradictory, or contested within each order, such that using the notion of a singular U.S.-dominated “rules-based order” to measure the success or failure of engagement of any state is conceptually and empirically problematic. China’s compliance with “order,” like that of many other countries, varies depending on which order is being considered.⁷

For example, arguably the most fundamental norms and practices in modern international relations have historically been sovereignty and territorial integrity. These define the very nature of the main actors in the system (states) and thus the nature of that system (inter-state, as opposed to imperial, supranational, or religious). One might call them the norms of a constitutive order that defines the current international system. There is nothing inherently “liberal” about these norms. They have existed from well before any liberal domestic or inter-state practices emerged, and they can be, and have been, defended using violence as well as peaceful legal processes. The dominant institution in today’s constitutive order is the United Nations. China is a strong supporter of the UN, and indeed in many of the other orders is trying to move global governance (e.g. internet governance) more firmly under UN supervision. This is perhaps the order that China, like the United States, most strongly supports.

At the other extreme, China is least supportive of what might be called the political development order—the international rules and norms which relate to how states should treat their own people politically. This order has, over time, increasingly stressed limits on state sovereignty when it comes to the protection of the civil and political liberties of individuals *vis-à-vis* the state. While this order is contested—only a small majority of states practice liberal democracy—

China uses the norms of one extant order to oppose the norms of another.

China has consistently opposed domestic liberalization or competitive democratic politics by invoking other powerful international norms such as sovereignty and noninterference in internal affairs.⁸ In short, China uses the norms of one extant order to oppose the norms of another.

Between these two extremes, China is moderately supportive of the current global trade order, which generally stresses free(ish) trade and multilateral management of trade disputes. While it is the least open of the major economies, many of China's bilateral and multilateral trade policies have been barrier reducing, not barrier raising. The first thing to remember is that China's official tariff rates are much lower today than when the U.S. engagement strategy was launched in the 1990s, with the largest drop coming after entry into the WTO. In addition, data on non-tariff barriers suggest some continued, if ragged, opening.

For example, according to a recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Trade Facilitation Indicators report, from 2015-2017, in five of 11 indicators China's performance improved, in two it regressed, and in four there was no change.⁹ Another OECD index on restrictions in service trade shows that from 2014-2018, China's barriers declined in eight of 22 sectors, increased in 10 sectors, and did not change in four sectors.¹⁰ Almost all of the barrier increases were relatively minor, except for telecommunications. On average, the overall service trade barriers index has declined somewhat since 2014.¹¹ And according to a new dataset that codes the design features of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) using, among other things, the "depth" or quality of the agreement (e.g. the range of trade and investment activities covered by the agreement), FTAs involving China have become deeper (higher quality) over time.¹² On the other hand, there is no doubt that there are persistent WTO-incompatible non-tariff trade barriers, including weak intellectual property protection, technology theft, and non-transparent regulatory practices, among others. Given this mixed picture, one might conclude China is moderately supportive of this order.

In short, arguably there is no single, consistent liberal world order, but there are multiple orders, some of which China strongly supports, some of which it strongly opposes, and some of which it supports inconsistently. It does not make conceptual or empirical or even policy sense to take the variation in China's approaches to a complex array of various contradictory orders and aggregate these using an out-of-date binary—status quo versus revisionist—to conclude that China rejects a singular U.S.-dominated liberal "rules-based order."

Indeed, to the extent that U.S. engagement policy was designed to tie China into some of these orders, and shape its behavior toward them, the empirical evidence would suggest a more complicated, partial success story. Back in 1997, President William Clinton established a set of criteria for measuring the success of his engagement policy: "Progress in each of these areas will draw China into the

institutions and arrangements that are setting the ground rules for the 21st century—the *security partnerships, the open trade arrangements, the arms control regime, the multinational coalitions against terrorism, crime and drugs, the commitments to preserve the environment and to uphold human rights.*”¹³ (Emphasis added.) Note the list of institutions in which he said engagement would lead China to participate more fully. It is problematic to claim that China is less economically open to trade today than in 1997, or less supportive of the arms control regimes it has joined than in 1997, or less committed to global counterterrorism today than in 1997, or less committed to dealing with greenhouse gases today than in 1997.¹⁴ These are relative statements, not absolute ones, of course.¹⁵

It is plausible to claim that, when it comes to traditional political and civil human rights (speech, assembly, protection of political and religious beliefs), there has been essentially no change over the years of engagement, and in some areas there has been considerable regression under Xi Jinping (e.g. the mass internment and forced cultural assimilation of Uyghurs being the most obvious example).¹⁶ Thus when it comes to political and civil rights, one could say that engagement has failed, using Clinton’s own criterion. But as I argue below, human rights in China, let alone democratization, has never been a prominent element in the practice of U.S. engagement policy, and little external pressure has been applied. Engagement can hardly be blamed for not achieving an outcome that it never took all that seriously or never expected to progress very far.

Clinton’s list did not include some norms and institutions that are more salient today than in 1997. For example, China is an obvious outlier in terms of its use of UN Law of the Sea noncompliant arguments (e.g. the Nine-Dashed line and historical rights within the line) and militarized diplomacy to claim special access to resources in the South China Sea. But overall, in five of the six domains that Clinton listed in 1997, arguably engagement has been associated with greater Chinese support for extant norms and institutions.

A Caricature of Liberalization Arguments

The second empirical claim is built on a straw person argument that is seemingly unquestioned in the current narrative. In an influential statement of the “engagement failed” idea, journalist James Mann wrote that proponents of engagement pose a scenario that “holds that China’s economic development will lead *inexorably* to an opening of China’s political system.”¹⁷ (Emphasis added.) In a more recent casting of this idea, Michael Pillsbury, a China policy adviser to President Trump, claims that engagers argued that “patience *but no pressure* from the United States” (emphasis added) would lead eventually from local to national-level democratization.¹⁸

Thus, according to the current narrative, a primary criterion for the success or failure of U.S. engagement was whether an authoritarian China would evolve into a much more politically liberal and/or democratic China. Since a politically liberal, even democratic, China has not emerged, engagement has been a failure. Vice President Mike Pence underscored this conclusion in an October 2018 speech on China: “Previous administrations made this choice [economic engagement of China] in the hope that freedom in China *would expand in all of its forms*—not just economically, but politically, with a newfound respect for classical liberal principles, private property, personal liberty, religious freedom—the entire family of human rights. But that hope has gone unfulfilled.”¹⁹ (Emphasis added.) And in a widely read article, scholars and policy practitioners Kurt Campbell and Ely Rather also noted that engagers “foresaw inevitable and increasing openness in China.” But this prediction was wrong. “Diplomatic and commercial engagement have not brought political and economic openness.”²⁰

These and other recent descriptions of the causal arguments made by proponents of engagement in the U.S. government are caricatures.²¹ Generally, the arguments made by engagers in the U.S. government about China were more nuanced than the simplistic claim that economic engagement would lead inevitably to political liberalization or democratization. First, engagers generally *did* expect that the liberalization of *societal* preferences was the predictable outcome of engagement and China’s integration into the global economy. The creation of more diverse socioeconomic interest groups increasingly dependent on benefits

Political liberalization and democratization were not the main criteria engagers used.

from the outside world would lead to more demand from ordinary citizens for more economic freedom, more lifestyle choices, and more government responsiveness. But, second, the political liberalization of governance (e.g. substantial improvements in freedom of speech, press, and association), let alone democratization, was not inevitable, given the power and interests of the Communist Party, and *would* in any event require con-

tinued pressure on human rights. Political liberalization and democratization were generally not the main criteria engagers used for judging the success of the policy. They believed that limited improvement in human rights performance was generally the most the United States could hope for, but even this goal was, in practice, a relatively low priority.

The engagement policy as generally referred to in the current discourse about China essentially started with the Clinton administration in the mid- to late 1990s, after explicit trade linkage to China’s human rights performance failed to lead to any improvement in the latter. What did Clinton officials say about the

relationship between engagement on the one hand and human rights and/or political liberalization on the other? Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeline Albright put it this way in 1997:

On human rights, overall progress has been hard to quantify. On the one hand, China's exposure to the outside world has brought increased openness, social mobility, choice of employment, and access to information. On the other hand, as we have documented in our annual human rights report, China's official practices still fall far short of internationally accepted standards.

It is our hope that the trend toward greater economic and social integration of China will have a liberalizing effect on political and human rights practices. Given the nature of China's government, *that progress will be gradual, at best, and is by no means inevitable.*

However, economic openness can create conditions that brave men and women dedicated to freedom can take advantage of to seek change. It diminishes the arbitrary power of the state over the day-to-day lives of its people. It strengthens the demand for the rule of law. It raises popular expectations. And it exposes millions of people to the simple, powerful idea that a better way of life is possible.²² (Emphasis added.)

Albright was explicit: there was nothing inevitable about economic engagement leading to political liberalization or even the improvement in human rights. Clinton's National Security Adviser, Samuel Berger, also argued in 1997 that:

We also have important differences with China, most particularly on human rights where, again, the President will raise this with President Jiang as we have consistently. We believe that human rights—we believe that engagement with China, that liberalization, economic liberalization of China over time has a liberalizing effect. As China increasingly is open to commerce, fax machines, e-mails, satellite dishes, it is increasingly difficult to suppress ideas, creativity, thought, opposition.

But that is not in and of itself a sufficient human rights policy. *Commercial diplomacy is not an adequate human rights policy.* We also have to stand up for the values that we believe in and that are not just American values, but that are universal values, that are embraced by many countries in Asia and all around the world, and *we have to speak for, speak out for and speak up for those who are fighting for those values in China—even if the dividend for that, even if progress from that is dreadfully slow.*²³ (Emphasis added.)

Later, in 2000, Berger argued, "Let me be clear: bringing China into the WTO is not, by itself, a human rights policy for the United States. The reality in China today is that Chinese authorities still tolerate no organized political dissent or opposition. Because the Communist Party's ideology has been discredited in China, and because it lacks the legitimacy that can only come from democratic choice, it seeks to maintain its grip by suppressing other voices. *Change will come only through a combination of internal pressures for change and external validation of its human rights struggle.*"²⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Like Albright, the core of Berger's claim was that engagement (manifest in China's integration into the global economy) would lead to societal liberalization, a pluralization of preferences and interests within Chinese society. He was not

arguing that there was anything inexorable about improved human rights, let alone liberal democratization. These outcomes would require external pressure, in conjunction with China's engagement in the global economy.

In early 1997, President Clinton also laid out the link between engagement and societal liberalization: "They're going through some significant changes themselves within their country—economic and political changes. And I believe that the impulses of the society and the nature of the economic change will work together along with the availability of information from the outside world to increase the spirit of liberty over time. I don't think there is any way that anyone who disagrees with that in China can hold back that—just as, eventually, the Berlin Wall fell. I just think it's inevitable. And I regret that we haven't had more progress there more quickly, but I still believe that the policy we are following is the correct one."²⁵ While he referred to the inevitability of Berlin Wall-like effects in China, the thrust of his argument was not a prediction about inevitable democratization as much as it was about the emergence of internal pressure on the regime to liberalize.

Later that year, in perhaps his fullest statement on engagement on China and the national interest, Clinton argued, "Our belief that, over time, growing interdependence would have a liberalizing effect in China *does not mean in the meantime we should or we can ignore abuses in China of human rights or religious freedom*. Nor does it mean that there is nothing we can do to speed the process of liberalization."²⁶ (Emphasis added.) Here again was the engagers' familiar theme: that economic interdependence would liberalize China (though he is somewhat vague on whether he meant society or governance), but political liberalization would require external pressure. There is not a strong sense of inexorability of political liberalization or democratization in this argument.

Whether China politically liberalized was up to China's leaders and required external pressure.

Moreover, for Clinton, the Communist Party itself would have to change, which was a major question mark. As he remarked in a 1999 speech, "Finally, let me say we have an interest in encouraging China to respect the human rights of its people and to give them a chance to shape the political destiny of their country ... China's leaders believe that significant political reform carries enormous risk of instability at this moment in their history. We owe it to any country to give a respectful listen to their stated policy about such

matters."²⁷ 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*.

Indeed, later in his 2000 State of the Union address, Clinton hedged even more about the effects of engagement on “change” in China. In advocating bringing China into the World Trade Organization, he argued, “I think you ought to do it for two reasons: First of all, our markets are already open to China; this agreement will open China’s markets to us. And second, it will plainly advance the cause of peace in Asia and promote the cause of change in China. *No, we don’t know where it’s going.* All we can do is decide what we’re going to do. But when all is said and done, we need to know we did everything we possibly could to maximize the chance that China will choose the right future.”²⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Interestingly, in early 2000 when the Clinton administration was in a full-court press to convince Congress to pass Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) legislation for China, it generally did not deviate from this basic argument. Given that opponents of PNTR argued that engagement rewarded a brutal authoritarian regime, one might have expected a more assertive claim by Clinton officials about inevitable political liberalization. U.S. officials, however, continued to stress the economic benefits for Americans of engagement and the liberalization of Chinese society and lifestyles, while still hedging about the likelihood of major political liberalization.²⁹ Robert Kapp, then head of the U.S.-China Business Council and active in supporting the Clinton administration’s lobbying for PNTR in 2000, bluntly stated in public testimony, PNTR “is not going to create a multi-party electoral democracy in Beijing. It is not going to establish habeas corpus or judicial review in China. It is not going to get people out of jail—or put people in jail.”³⁰ But rejecting PNTR would make a range of U.S.-China disputes, including over political change, more difficult to resolve.

Clinton’s successors continued to refrain from drawing a direct causal line from engagement to democratization. Then-candidate George W. Bush stated in 1999: “Economic freedom creates habits of liberty. And habits of liberty create expectations of democracy. *There are no guarantees, but there are good examples, from Chile to Taiwan.* Trade freely with China, and time is on our side.”³¹ (Emphasis added.) Note the hedging—“there are no guarantees.” And in 2005, in one of the fullest statements of the Bush administration’s engagement policy, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick essentially repeated the Clinton administration argument that engagement and internationalization would lead to social liberalization and bottom-up demands for political change: “Closed politics cannot be a permanent feature of Chinese society. It is simply not sustainable—as economic growth continues, better-off Chinese will want a greater say in their future, and pressure builds for political reform.”³² But he did not say further political reform was inevitable. Indeed, he went on to tell the Chinese regime what *it* needed to do to liberalize. It was not a prediction or an expectation about any automatic or smooth or inexorable evolution of political liberalization.

In addition to very senior policymakers, working level specialists in the executive branch before, during, and after the Clinton period also did not believe that liberalizing China's political system was a realistic policy goal of engagement. As Ambassador Chas Freeman, who had been in the thick of China policy from the Nixon through Clinton administrations, summarizes: "However much the American public may have hoped or expected that China would Americanize itself, U.S. policy was almost entirely aimed at changing China's external behavior rather than its constitutional order."³³ Winston Lord, recalling his time as Ambassador to China in the late 1980s, remarked about the role of human rights in his work—it "was not a dominant issue."³⁴ Former NSC Director of Asian Affairs Robert Suettinger's account of Clinton's China policy paints a picture of desultory, generally poorly coordinated initiatives to get politically minimal concessions from the Chinese government (e.g. releases of particular dissidents, signatures on certain human rights conventions) that might have domestic benefit for the U.S. president.³⁵ Indeed, Lord later testified to the Congressional Executive Commission on China that Clinton undermined State Department efforts on human rights due to his focus on the economic benefits of engagement.³⁶ Thomas Christensen, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in charge of China policy during the George W. Bush administration, made similar causal arguments as the Clinton administration did about how engagement could improve the liberality of society.³⁷ And in the Obama administration, according to recollections by one of Obama's senior directors for Asia Policy, Jeffrey Bader, the list of foreign policy goals in East Asia did not include changing China's political system.³⁸

It is worth noting that the prediction made by engagers about the liberalization of Chinese society and the rise of interest and social groups who support more social and economic liberality, as well as greater accountability and transparency from the regime, has actually been fairly accurate. While there are debates in the field as to how much liberalization of societal attitudes has occurred, a range of different types of public opinion studies show that urban educated Chinese youth, Chinese citizens with exposure to the outside world, and citizens who work in joint ventures or who are generally more deeply tied into the global economy (particularly people in the most internationalized cities of China) tend to have more liberal worldviews and are less nationalistic on average than older or less internationalized members of Chinese society.³⁹

In short, China's economic development and integration, aided to a large degree by U.S. engagement policy, appears to have worked in liberalizing societal attitudes, as engagers predicted. Whether the regime would respond positively to these attitudes and preferences was less certain and depended on the interests of the Communist Party and, to some degree, on external pressure on human

rights. 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.

If No Engagement, Then What?

Finally, putting aside the conceptual and empirical problems with the “engagement failed” argument, its proponents need to think more carefully about the counterfactual logic of their claim. What do they believe the world would look like if the United States had rejected engagement early on?⁴⁰ Would China be more or less socially and economically liberal? Would China be more or less supportive of the nuclear nonproliferation regime? Would China be more or less supportive of containing greenhouse gases? The “engagement failed” advocates implicitly and sometimes explicitly make the following counterfactual argument: if the United States had not engaged China, it would have had at least a two decade jump in balancing or containing the PRC. The United States would have mobilized the capabilities and resources to deal with China earlier, making U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere more secure than they are today.⁴¹

What would the world look like if the United States had rejected engagement early on?

But “engagement failed” advocates would also logically have to make a strong case against other, equally plausible, but less optimistic counterfactual histories. One such alternative might be that without engagement, the United States would have faced a hostile, nuclear-armed China alienated from a range of international institutions and norms, kept out of global markets, and with limited societal/cultural exchanges. In other words, a China still ruled by a ruthless Leninist Party but one that had massively mobilized and militarized to vigorously oppose U.S. interests. This type of China could have easily made things more difficult, even for a mobilized United States, stepping up its efforts to subvert pro-U.S. governments around its periphery, to compel Taiwan’s reunification, to more proactively support North Korean and Iranian nuclearization plans as well as undermine the nonproliferation regime, and to mobilize ethnic Chinese populations in the West, thus leading to sharper ethno-political division and discrimination within comparatively fragile multicultural democratic societies. Then there would be the overall socioeconomic benefits forgone due to earlier confrontation with China—the material benefits from trade and the future benefits from cooperation on the threat from climate change.⁴²

In short, this counterfactual reality would feature a much more dystopian U.S.-China relationship than exists today. Given the non-linearity of much of history, this latter counterfactual, or other equally pessimistic ones, could be more plausible than the more benign one that “engagement has failed” advocates would have to endorse. This is an important logical question that the “engagement has failed” argument has heretofore not really addressed.

The Value of Complexity

In sum, today’s dominant narrative about the failure of engagement—embodied in the 2017 *National Security Strategy* and in a great deal of punditry of late—is ahistorical and simplistic. It mischaracterizes and sometimes omits the causal arguments used by key figures in the engagement strategy. For the most part, the U.S. government’s engagement strategy did not posit that systemic political liberalization or democratization was inexorable or inevitable. Substantive political liberalization and/or democratization in China would be a hard and unpredictable slog that combined both the liberalization of mass attitudes in China, external pressure on the PRC regime, as well as considerable change in the preferences for self-preservation of the Communist Party. Nor was political change in China the core goal of engagement.

The “engagement failed” argument also exaggerates the degree to which there is, or ever was, a singular liberal world order, and thus it also mismeasures, or cherry-picks evidence about, the nature of Chinese diplomacy across various orders and issue areas (what social scientists would call “selecting on the dependent variable”). China is relatively on board some orders, is ambivalent about others, and strongly opposes still others.

Finally, the “engagement failed” argument fails to defend logical and plausible counterfactual arguments about why U.S. interests, or the interests of the globe as a whole, would have been better met had the United States never pursued engagement in the first place.

Perhaps the most accurate assessment of the effects of the engagement policy came from the Dalai Lama in 1997, an assessment still applicable today. When asked about whether engagement had failed, he said that he did not regard the policy as “a complete failure. The situation is more complicated.”⁴³

It is hard to tell at this point how much the exaggeration of the failures of engagement has actually impacted concrete day-to-day interactions between the United States and China. But I think a reasonable expectation is that the caricature of the engagement policies of the past risks narrowing the imaginable range of cooperation and contributing to the intensification of the U.S.-China security dilemma in the future.

Notes

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2. Testimony by Aaron L. Friedberg, Strategic Competition with China, Committee on Arms Services, House of Representatives, 115 Congress, Second Session, February 15, 2018, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg28995/html/CHRG-115hhrg28995.htm>
3. Former U.S. Under-Secretary for Defense Michele Flournoy, *Nine Lessons for Navigating National Security* (March 25, 2016), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/nine-lessons-for-navigating-national-security>.
4. Ely Ratner and Brad Carson, "Jaw-Jaw: How America Got China Wrong" January 22, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/jaw-jaw-how-america-got-china-wrong/>.
5. Rawi Abdelal and Sophie Meunier, "Managed Globalization: Doctrine, Practice and Promise," *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 3 (April 2010): 350–367.
6. An ideal point analysis of UN General Assembly voting records shows, for example, that in 2015, the most recent year for data, the vast majority of UN members took positions closer to China than to the United States. Those with ideal points closer to the United States than to China were mostly European countries. For UNGA ideal point data as of 2015 see: Erik Voeten, Anton Strezhnev, Michael Bailey, "United Nations General Assembly Voting Data," <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/12379>.
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8. China's effort to downplay the relative status of political rights vis-à-vis social and economic rights is not new, of course. Beijing was a major player in getting the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 to agree on the equal standing of political and socio-economic rights. The U.S. endorsed the conference declaration.
9. OECD, "Compare Your Country - Trade Facilitation Indicators," accessed May 12, 2019, <http://compareyourcountry.org/trade-facilitation>.
10. OECD, "The OECD Services Trade Restrictiveness Index," accessed May 12, 2019, <http://www.oecd.org/trade/topics/services-trade/>.
11. *The OECD Services Trade Restrictiveness Index: Policy Trends up to 2019*, <https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/stri-policy-trends-2019-web>, 7.

12. Andreas Dur, Leonardo Baccini and Manfred Elsig, "The Design of International Trade Agreements: Introducing a New Database," *Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 3 (2014): 353–375.
13. President William Clinton, "China and the National Interest" (October 27, 1997) U.S. Department of State Dispatch, November 1, 1997, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/publications/dispatch/Nov1997.pdf>, 3.
14. See the citations in note 7 above.
15. Some critics of engagement agree on this complex picture, but then seem to arbitrarily weight the moral or practical value of these different behaviors. See, for example, Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (Mar/Apr 2018): 68.
16. This conclusion is based on the most comprehensive dataset on democratization and liberalization (VDEM <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>).
17. James Mann, *The China Fantasy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 2.
18. Pillsbury, *Hundred Year Marathon*, 8.
19. Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, October 4, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.
20. Campbell and Ratner, "The China Reckoning," 61. For other recent statements of this version of the "failure of engagement" from a range of media and government sources see John Pomfret, "Engagement with China Is Failing. Time for 'Constructive Vigilance,'" *Washington Post*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/11/28/engagement-with-china-is-failing-time-for-constructive-vigilance/>; Congressional-Executive Committee on China, CECC Releases 2016 Annual Report," press release, October 6, 2016, <https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/cecc-releases-2016-annual-report>. In fact, none of these critiques of engagement is original. In the 1990s, critics of the Clinton administration also claimed that engagement (trade without linkages to human rights) had failed since human rights conditions were worsening then. See for example comments by Congressman Christopher Smith in Steven Erlanger, "China Policy: Politics Rules," *New York Times*, April 29, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/29/world/china-policy-politics-rules.html>.
21. I focus on the causal arguments that the U.S. executive branch has made about engagement because the primary criticisms are that it is a failed U.S. government strategy.
22. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright Statement before the Senate Finance Committee (Washington, D.C., June 10, 1997), <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/970610.html>.
23. Transcript of White House Press Briefing by Samuel Berger (October 23, 1997) U.S. Newswire (FACTIVA) accessed May 11, 2019.
24. Samuel R. Berger, (speech, The Business Roundtable St. Regis Hotel Washington, DC, February 14, 2000) M2 Prewire (FACTIVA) accessed May 10, 2019. Later in 2000 he noted "Just as NAFTA membership eroded the economic base of one-party rule in Mexico, WTO membership, accompanied by external validation of the human rights struggle, can help do the same in China" (emphasis added). Samuel Berger (speech, Georgetown University October 19, 2000) U.S. Newswire (FACTIVA) accessed May 11, 2019.
25. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton*, 1997, Jan 1 - June 30, 1997, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1997-book1/pdf/PPP-1997-book1.pdf>, 84.

26. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Address on China and the National Interest," October 24, 1997, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/html/19971024-3863.html>.
27. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Foreign Policy Speech," April 7, 1999, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/html/19990407-2873.html>.
28. William Clinton, "State of the Union Address (January 27, 2000)" in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, 2000-2001*, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2000-book1/pdf/PPP-2000-book1-doc-pg129.pdf>, 136. See also his China speech in March 2000 at the School of Advanced International Studies, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2000-book1/pdf/PPP-2000-book1.pdf>. Not surprisingly, those in charge of economic relations with China during the Clinton Administration also tended not to make a connection between engagement and political liberalization. The most they hoped for was economic liberalization, and such change would not be automatic. See the speech by then-U.S. Trade Representative, Charlene Barshefsky, to the The Wharton School in August 2000, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/files/original/06d9202af9f924fae390d3978006fec1.pdf>, 4; and the draft speech by then-Director of the National Economic Council, Gene Sperling, to the Economic Strategy Institute in February 2000, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/files/original/3b07ee8ca5d1157edc809f7f4816684d.pdf>, 3.
29. See the collection of draft talking points, speeches, and op-eds by Clinton and Berger in favor of PNTR <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/files/original/6aed252d5b343bf19a422e4b95bddf39.pdf>.
30. Testimony by Robert A. Kapp, President, U.S.-China Business Council, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April 11, 2000, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106shrg66499/html/CHRG-106shrg66499.htm>.
31. Governor George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California, November 19, 1999, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm>.
32. Robert Zoellick, "Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility," (speech, New York, September 21, 2005), https://www.ncuscr.org/sites/default/files/migration/Zoellick_remarks_notes06_winter_spring.pdf.
33. Chas Freeman, "Sino-American Interactions, Past and Future" January 2019, <https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/china/china-program-2019/freeman.pdf>, 2–3.
34. Cited in Nancy Bernhoff Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 403.
35. Robert Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations 1989-2000* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2003).
36. Testimony by Winston Lord, "Tiananmen at 25: Enduring Influence on U.S. China Relations and China's Political Development," hearing before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 113th Congress, Second Session. (May 20, 2014), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhr88495/html/CHRG-113hhr88495.htm>.
37. See Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2015), 181.
38. Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012), 6–8

39. See, for example, Min Tang, Dwayne Woods, and Jujun Zhao “The Attitudes of the Chinese Middle Class Towards Democracy” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* (2009) 14: 81–95; Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu “China’s Ideological Spectrum,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): 254–273; Yichen Guan, Dustin Tingley, David Romney, Amaney Jamal, and Robert Keohane, “Chinese Views of the United States: Evidence from Weibo” *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* (August 2018) advance view, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy021>; and Donglin Han and David Zweig, “Images of the World: Studying Abroad and Chinese Attitudes towards International Affairs,” *The China Quarterly* Issue 202 (June 2010): 290–306. Also see World Values Survey questions for Chinese respondents on democratic values, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp> (accessed May 10, 2019).
40. I thank the University of Maryland’s Margaret Pearson for raising this question.
41. See, for example, Robert D. Blackwill, “Trump’s Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem,” *Council Special Report* (Council on Foreign Relations) no. 84 (April 2019):10.
42. See, for example, the counterfactual speculation by Joshua Shiffrin, “Should the United States Fear China’s Rise?” *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2018): 73–74.
43. See Laura Myers, “Dalai Lama Says China ‘In Process of Changing,’” *Dow Jones Newswires*, April 23, 1997 (FACTIVA), accessed May 10, 2019.