



## Refocusing US Grand Strategy on Pandemic and Environmental Mass Destruction

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# Refocusing US Grand Strategy on Pandemic and Environmental Mass Destruction

Amidst all the criticisms of the Trump foreign policy, one aspect that has received substantial praise has been the emphasis on great power competition. “After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned,” the 2017 National Security Strategy declared. “Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the [Defense] Department,” the 2018 National Defense Strategy affirmed.<sup>1</sup> While President Trump’s own statements and policies in which he has been most directly involved have not exactly tracked with such doctrinal declarations, it has been the president, not the overall strategy, that has been most criticized. By one count using the Nexis database, 141 news articles referenced “great power competition” (GPC) during the eight years of the George W. Bush administration, 1,021 did during the Obama administration mostly during the second term, and over 6,500 through the first roughly two and half Trump years.<sup>2</sup>

In many respects, the GPC strategic paradigm’s resurgence is understandable. China and Russia have been quite assertive and, especially in the last few years,

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outright aggressive. Chinese President Xi Jinping invokes China's "great civilization of 5,000 years" and its "century of humiliation" as historical justification for reclaiming great power status.<sup>3</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin's "historical narrative," as Brookings fellows Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy put it, is one "in which Russia constantly battles for survival against a hostile outside world."<sup>4</sup> That within American politics the hawkish side of the street tends to be safer on foreign policy issues also is a factor. Russia has been one of the few issues on which Congressional Republicans have been at least somewhat critical of Trump. Democrats have offered *mea culpas* for being too accommodationist toward China. Add to this the social psychological element that, as journalist Evan Osnos puts it, after almost two decades of "unwinnable slogs in Afghanistan and the Middle East, the prospect of reprising the Cold War—the last major conflict that Washington won—offers the familiar comfort of an old boot."<sup>5</sup>

**COVID-19 has killed more Americans than Vietnam, the Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars combined**

What, though, about pandemic prevention? COVID-19 has killed more Americans than the Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars combined.<sup>6</sup> Its economic devastation rivals the Great Depression. Its disruption of daily life is like no other. Even those fortunate enough not to have died or lost their jobs and businesses have had their most fundamental sense of security shaken. Will my family stay healthy? When will there be at least some sense of normalcy in daily life? And even if a vaccine is developed and COVID-19 wanes, what about the next pan-

demic? "In a globalized world," as former World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland warned, "we all swim in a single microbial sea."<sup>7</sup> With scientists having identified almost 30,000 coronaviruses with potential to transmit from animals to humans, shouldn't the potential for pandemic mass destruction (PMD) be central to the next American grand strategy?<sup>8</sup>

And what about environmental mass destruction (EMD)? When in January 2020, the doomsday clock was moved to "100 seconds before midnight," the closest it has ever been, it was because of climate change as well as weapons of mass destruction (WMD). One warning report after another—global warming, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, species extinction, desertification—flashes bright red. Hurricane Isaias, which struck in early August, was the ninth named storm in the Atlantic-Caribbean this year, more than ever before this early in the hurricane season. With US real estate database Zillow projecting US\$916 billion in risks to American housing values from rising sea levels, going underwater is taking on a much more literal meaning.<sup>9</sup> As for American global interests, a 2015 Pentagon study stressed that "global climate change will aggravate problems

such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership, and weak political institutions that threaten stability in a number of countries.”<sup>10</sup> The 400,000 deaths globally per year from climate change compare to less than 16,000 (in 2018) from terrorism, and they are projected to increase 50 percent by 2030.<sup>11</sup>

Whether we apply professor Barry Posen’s conception of grand strategy as “a nation-state’s theory about how it can produce security for itself”; historian Hal Brands’ “the theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world”; or scholar Paul Kennedy’s “the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests”<sup>12</sup>—three criteria can be derived for assessing competing claims for strategic prioritization:

- *threat assessment*: how severe is the threat to vital interests?
- *strategy viability*: how likely is the strategy to attract allies and partners?
- *domestic base*: can support be mobilized within American politics for sustaining the strategy?

Applying these criteria, I present the case for a “P-EMD” grand strategy, focused on pandemic and climate change prevention, over a GPC one.

Before doing so, however, I have a caveat and point of emphasis. The caveat is that I focus particularly on China as the GPC manifestation. It is true that the Russian nuclear arsenal poses the most potentially devastating threat to the United States. And that Russia has been quite the active military intervener—Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan bounties—and has been continuing to disrupt American as well as other democratic elections.<sup>13</sup> But while there is plenty of debate about optimal policy on these and other issues related to Russia, there are few calls for a Russia-centric grand strategy.<sup>14</sup>

The point of emphasis is that arguing that China should not be the core basis for US grand strategy does not mean it should not get significant policy attention. Of course it should. But for grand strategy to be a useful construct, relative priorities have to be set, and choices have to be made.<sup>15</sup> For the United States to once again be the global leader it aspires to be, and to best protect the American people, preventing pandemics and mitigating climate change need to be top strategic priorities going forward.

## Flaws in a China-Centric Grand Strategy

Along with the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy cited above, the bipartisan US-China Economic and Security Review

Commission warns of Beijing seeking to expand its “China dream” into the “world’s dream.”<sup>16</sup> Scholar Ashley Tellis and colleagues see China as seeking “to reshape the international system to serve its strategic aims.”<sup>17</sup> Hal Brands and former national security advisor to then-Vice President Biden, Jake Sullivan, warn of not just one, but two paths China is pursuing for global domination.<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding decades of risk of nuclear war with the Soviet Union, former Obama administration officials Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner portray China as “the most dynamic and formidable competitor in modern history.”<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Ward, founder of the strategic advisory firm Atlas Organization, points ahead to the 2049 centennial of the Chinese communist revolution as their target date for achieving global dominance.<sup>20</sup> A senior Trump administration official added a clash of civilizations dimension, with a touch of racist yellow peril, that this is “the first time that we will have a great power competitor that is not Caucasian.”<sup>21</sup> All this seems to fit the historical logic of a rising power—the latest chapter in what John Mearsheimer calls the “tragedy of great power politics” and Graham Allison refers to as the “Thucydidean trap.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Threat Assessment**

Beijing sure has been providing China hawks plenty of material to work with. It has continued to militarize the South China Sea despite its 2015 pledge not to do so and the 2016 Hague Court ruling against its sovereignty claim. It further expanded its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with a more than 40 percent increase to around US\$130 billion in new contracts in 2019.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding Trumpian efforts to deflect from his administration’s own incompetent handling of the COVID-19 crisis, China did warrant blame for withholding information on the original outbreak in December 2019 and its bullying diplomacy against a number of countries. In mid-June, Chinese troops killed at least 20 Indian troops in a Himalayan border clash. Days later, Australia all but called China out as the “sophisticated state-based actor” engaging in massive cyber-attacks.<sup>24</sup> In early July, Beijing imposed a new draconian national security law on Hong Kong, effectively renegeing on its 23-year-old “one country, two systems” pledge. Also in July, FBI Director Christopher Wray accused Beijing of “a whole-of-state effort to become the world’s only superpower, by any means necessary,” citing over 5,000 current investigations of Chinese technology theft and other cyber-attacks in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Others, though, question this assessment of China’s quest for global domination. Acknowledging, as scholar David Lampton does, that China’s aspiration going back 150 years to the Qing dynasty has been “to regain the nation’s former status as a great power that controls its own fate” does not mean that it seeks to control others’ fate.<sup>26</sup> Harvard’s Alastair Iain Johnston disputes the blanket “failure of engagement” accusation, showing that while China has not

been inclined to being a US-defined “responsible stakeholder,” it has pursued a differentiated strategy supportive of some but not other domains of the existing world order.<sup>27</sup> A July 2019 open letter organized by MIT Professor Taylor Fravel and signed by close to 100 academic, policy, military, and business leaders stressed being clear-eyed about the “serious challenges” Beijing’s actions pose and meeting them with “a firm and effective U.S. response” while recognizing that these do not amount to “an existential national security threat.”<sup>28</sup>

The democracies versus autocracies ideological formulation is another China hawk line of argument.<sup>29</sup> But it has four fundamental flaws. First, it greatly overattributes commonality of interests among autocracies, particularly Russia and China, mirroring the Cold War monolithic view of global communism that blinded policymakers to the Sino-Soviet split and to the distinctiveness of Third World nationalism. Second, it is inconsistent, if not hypocritical, about all the non-democracies the United States counts as allies (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Vietnam, and Hungary). Third, it assumes an attractiveness for the democratic model belied by America’s own current realities, notably its close-to-world’s-worst COVID-19 policies (as of August 10, the United States has 22 percent of global COVID-19 deaths but only 4 percent of world population) and latest manifestations of deep-seeded racial injustice.<sup>30</sup> Fourth, it ignores the cooperation that the United States had during the Cold War with the Soviet Union on issues like arms control and nonproliferation, conflict escalation management, and smallpox eradication as well as, in recent years, with both Russia and China on the Iran nuclear nonproliferation agreement and with China on the 2015 Paris climate accord.

Without lapsing into apologies for Beijing, one does need to objectively assess the extent to which some Chinese actions are reactions to Trump provocations. This assessment does not mean accepting the overly expansive South China Sea nine-dash line or claims that the Uighurs are terrorists or that peaceful pro-democracy Hong Kong protesters are foreign agents. As one of the American journalists kicked out of China pointed out, his situation was “the direct result of American policy” having previously expelled 60 Chinese journalists.<sup>31</sup> The US-China trade war has been full of back-and-forth tit-for-tats. So have the consulate closures: first the Chinese consulate in Houston closed, then the American one in Chengdu. And with Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pushing the “Wuhan virus” label, Chinese retorts about an American conspiracy underlying the pandemic are not all that surprising.<sup>32</sup>

**The democracies versus autocracies ideological formulation has four fundamental flaws**

Finally, it is not at all clear that his greater assertiveness has been working for Xi.<sup>33</sup> His breaking of the two-term limit complied with by every Chinese president since 1982 feeding speculation that he may intend to be president for life both intimidates and stirs resentments which, while unlikely to lead to a palace coup, manifests in bureaucratic slow-walks and other maneuvers. The Hong Kong de facto seizure has proceeded without evident party dissent, but the consequences have already been hitting both from other governments (e.g., the British offer of citizenship to Hong Kong residents and anti-Huawei reversal after earlier resistance to American pressure) and multinational companies (e.g., tech companies refusing to hand over data, major financial institutions considering relocating).<sup>34</sup> The Chinese economy was already in slowdown amidst the trade war with the United States. Xi's own deflections of blame for COVID-19 to Wuhan and other officials have been less than convincing, especially once a second wave hit with a percolating sense that "people who lost their loved ones to COVID-19 are demanding answers and accountability."<sup>35</sup> "Global Backlash Builds against China over Coronavirus," read a *New York Times* headline about numerous countries pushing their own concerns about Beijing's pandemic actions and inactions even while staying short of Trump's blame-mongering.<sup>36</sup> All told, as Chinese-American scholar Minxin Pei writes, Xi has been digging a "deepening geopolitical hole."<sup>37</sup> While Xi may double down on repression at home and aggression abroad, he also may see it as in his own interest to course correct in a more moderate direction at home and abroad.

### Strategy Viability

One of the defining geopolitical dynamics differentiating the current era from the Cold War is that few states see their national interests best served by a largely exclusive relationship with just one major power. Alliances and partnerships still matter, but they are less binding than when countries principally signed up

**Alliances and partnerships still matter, but they are less binding than during the Cold War**

with one side or the other. Indeed, more states are having more relations with each other on a wider range of issues than when the global agenda was largely set by major powers. The importance of the US-China dyad does make it a partially polar world, but only partially, circumscribed by middle power and even many small states basing their policies more on their own national interests and domestic politics than the preferences of major

powers. Accordingly, while Indo-Pacific allies need the reassurance of American presence and commitment, they are not looking for a bipolarization of the region. Even with heightened tensions with China, they also have their own

interests in maintaining relations with Beijing. India went ahead with its trilateral summit with Russia and China just a week after the deadly border clash. Despite almost two months of inconclusive negotiations, Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar still spoke of “a huge premium on reaching some kind of equilibrium or understanding between the two [countries].”<sup>38</sup> Japan conducts bilateral summits with China and with South Korea trilateral ones. While assessing Australia-China relations as “about as bad as I can remember,” former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans still stressed “plenty of room for cooperation.”<sup>39</sup>

Other regions show similar dynamics. “Defending EU Interests and Values in a Complex and Vital Partnership” was how the European Union titled its official statement after a less-than-successful June 2020 summit with China: interests and values to be defended, but within a partnership deemed vital.<sup>40</sup> Despite all the support the Trump administration has given Israel, China has become Israel’s largest Asian trading partner and an increasing investor in its economy. This includes the Shanghai International Port Group building a new container ship port in Haifa, in spite of US objections of security risks to the Sixth Fleet on port calls at a proximate naval base. Saudi Arabia, another Trump favorite, is in the middle of a five-year security cooperation agreement with China including counterterrorism, military exercises, purchases of Chinese military technology, and, according to recent intelligence reports, possible collaboration on Saudi development of nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup> In Latin America, where China already is many countries’ top trade partner, forecasters see it “playing a key role [post-pandemic] in regional infrastructure projects and investing in sectors like power generation and mining.”<sup>42</sup>

These collaborations, though, do not indicate that countries are conceding to and complying with Beijing’s preferences on a host of issues. All of these countries favor their relations with the United States; they just don’t want this relationship to preclude national interest-based relations with China. Moreover, they have been setting limits and pushing back against Chinese overreach. While not explicitly anti-China, intra-regional agreements like the recent Australia-India base sharing, Australia-Japan defense cooperation including bilateral military exercises, and efforts to enhance ASEAN security cooperation are playing an increasing part in regional security. In July 2020, shifting from President Rodrigo Duterte’s cozying up to China, the Philippines firmed up its position that the international court ruling on the South China Sea dispute “conclusively settled the issue” that China’s claim “had no basis in law.”<sup>43</sup> The EU has toughened its positions on trade issues, tightened screening of investments in critical technologies and sectors, and developed its own strategy for connecting Europe and Asia as an alternative to BRI.<sup>44</sup> A number of BRI recipient countries are opposing it as more exploitative than mutually beneficial.<sup>45</sup> Multilateral institutions like the UN Human Rights High Commissioner and the International Criminal Court have been exerting more pressure than in the past on China over democracy and

human rights issues like the Uighurs and Hong Kong.<sup>46</sup> While distancing from Trumpian “Wuhan virus” labeling, countries also have rejected the “wolf-warrior” social media defense of China’s COVID-19 diplomacy.<sup>47</sup>

The key for US policy is working with, not against, these forces, reinforcing other countries’ interests in restraining China without counterproductive pressuring into a new Cold War with-us-or-with-them framework. Such limits on American leverage should not be a surprise. Even before Trumpian America First denigration, allies and partners were reluctant to comply with American preferences on a number of key issues. In the Obama years, for example, Pakistan was resistant to pressures on bin Laden and the Israelis on policy toward the Palestinians and Iran. And the Bush administration had rather substantial problems getting support for the Iraq war and other policies. It’s not journalist Moisés Naím’s “end of power,” but it is a significant leverage gap between power as measured by military capabilities as well as other stocks and the capacity to convert such resources to the actual exertion of influence over other countries’ policies.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, while such national and regional initiatives are well short of balancing out Chinese power on their own, they provide a welcome basis for the United States to work with, at a time in which, as two leading defense analysts put it, “defending the homeland from catastrophic threats is far more urgent than defending against foreign threats far from American shores.”<sup>49</sup>

### Domestic Support Base

Being tough on China is very much in the political air. The Trump camp launched a #BeijingBiden Twitter ad campaign depicting Biden as “China’s puppet.”<sup>50</sup> For its part, the Biden campaign ran an ad criticizing Trump for not holding China accountable on COVID-19—saying that Biden “would be on the phone with China and making it clear: ‘We are going to need to be in your country’”—and that Trump businesses allegedly owe tens of millions of dollars to the Bank of China.<sup>51</sup> At his press conferences billed as COVID-19 updates, Trump talks more about China than public health. Whereas the 2016 Democratic Party platform mentioned China eight times, the 2020

**While critical of China, the American public remains pragmatic**

platform does so 25 times.<sup>52</sup> The Committee on the Present Danger: China—the revival and re-branding of the Cold War anti-détente group that now brings together longstanding neoconservatives like Frank Gaffney and rightist populists like Steve Bannon—has come on to the Washington scene.<sup>53</sup>

But while critical of China, the American public remains pragmatic. A June-July 2020 Pew Research Center poll does show a jump to 73 percent with an “unfavorable” view of China (47 percent in

2016 and 60 percent in 2018) and 78 percent on China being a “great deal/fair amount to blame” for the COVID-19 crisis. But on whether China is a partner, enemy, or competitor, only 26 percent hold the enemy view, and 57 percent stick to the competitor view. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs July 2020 poll showed similar patterns with 55 percent seeing China as a critical threat but 47 percent still favoring friendly cooperation and engagement. A Morning Consult poll on responsibility for “the current death toll in the United States from the COVID-19 pandemic” found just as high a percentage blaming “Americans who did not socially distance” as blamed China (73 percent).<sup>54</sup>

Even given recent Chinese atrocities against the Uighurs and China’s blatant crackdown on Hong Kong, the mobilizing effect of democracy promotion pitches is much overrated. Of 26 foreign policy goals in a 2018 Pew poll, promoting democracy in other nations came out 25th with only 17 percent support; promoting and defending human rights only a bit better at 19th and 31 percent support. Even in the heady days immediately post-Cold War, democracy and human rights promotion only got 22 percent support.<sup>55</sup> On trade issues, 72 percent of those polled last year were concerned that the trade war with China was hurting the American economy.<sup>56</sup> The unreliability of supply chains amidst the COVID-19 crisis has had as much to do with what Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman call “the rule of markets” and American business’ pursuit of low costs and high profits as with Beijing’s neo-mercantilism.<sup>57</sup> While these political patterns won’t prevent the next administration from some toughening toward China, they are not much of a domestic support base in which to anchor a China-centric grand strategy.

There have been times when the American people needed to be stirred out of threat underestimation, as President Harry Truman did in the late 1940s. But there have been many over- and mis-estimations of foreign policy threats by policy analysts and senior policy makers. Cold War policy in the Third World was full of them: the Vietnam war, 1965 Indonesia mass murders, the backing of one military regime after another in Latin America, support for kleptocrats like Zaire’s Mobutu, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and other global war on terrorism (GWOT) policies. Given this historical context as well as the substantive debate about Beijing’s intentions, it is prudent to be wary of what journalist and political scientist Fareed Zakaria calls a “new China scare.”<sup>58</sup>

## **PMD and EMD: Clear and Present Dangers**

Skeptics may question shifting the focus away from great power China onto diffuse threats. Can any country really have a grand strategy against threats that do not have country names and cannot be portrayed as having bad guy leaders? Granted, the COVID-19 crisis has been a major one, and global warming does

keep getting worse, but even so: doesn't grand strategy still have to be about power politics? Aren't these issues mostly about domestic policy?

Yes, no, and no.

### Threat Assessment

"The United States and the world will remain vulnerable to the next flu pandemic or largescale outbreak of a contagious disease that could lead to massive rates of death and disability, severely affect the world economy, [and] strain international resources."<sup>59</sup> Rarely has a statement from the Director of National Intelligence's Worldwide Threat Assessment been as accurate as this 2019 one. The grim statistics cited earlier—death toll greater than four recent wars combined, a Great Depression-like economic haymaker, and basic personal security in daily life upended—speak to what has very much been and will continue to be a clear and present danger.

Beyond America's shores, COVID-19 has "the potential to wreak havoc in fragile states, trigger widespread unrest and severely test international crisis management systems," as assessed by the International Crisis Group.<sup>60</sup> US Institute of Peace President Nancy Lindborg sees a "train wreck with the potential to trigger a devastating multidimensional-tiered health, economic, political, and security crisis."<sup>61</sup> Stanford political scientist Francis Fukuyama warns that "the desperate will seek to migrate, demagogic leaders will exploit the situation to seize power,

**A next pandemic is well within the high confidence threat assessment of being a matter of when more than if**

corrupt politicians will take the opportunity to steal what they can, and many governments will clamp down or collapse."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, even if a COVID-19 vaccine is developed, with Gro Brundtland's sea of microbes and the 30,000 coronaviruses with potential to transmit from animals to humans in mind, a next pandemic is well within the high confidence threat assessment band of being a matter of "when" more than "if."<sup>63</sup> As Peter Daszak, chairman of the Forum on Microbial Threats at the National Academies of Sciences,

Engineering and Medicine, put it, "We don't think twice about the cost of protecting against terrorism. We go out there, we listen to the whispers, we send out the drones—we have a whole array of approaches. We need to start thinking about pandemics the same way."<sup>64</sup>

In its 2018 Report, the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made its warning even more dire—that even if every nation were to meet its Paris Agreement pledge, it would only amount to less than half of what is needed for progress in this decade to be on track for

the end of century goal of keeping temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 °F). Never mind the end of the century—the World Meteorological Organization recently forecast that the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise may come in the next four years.<sup>65</sup> Along with the statistics cited earlier of climate change death tolls so much greater than terrorism, climate change has been linked as a *cause* of terrorism, for example in ISIS’ recruiting in rural Iraq and Syria “of desperate farmhands swapping backhoes for assault rifles.”<sup>66</sup> A number of studies have shown that climate change’s threat-multiplier effect feeds other insurgencies in ways that could pose “significant threats to U.S. military missions across all of its geographic areas of responsibility (AORs), as well as to regional security institutions and infrastructure that are critical for maintaining global security.”<sup>67</sup>

How can such severe and imminent threats be kept peripheral, and not made central, to grand strategy?

### **Strategy Viability**

Viral microbes are the epitome of what international relations scholar Thomas Weiss calls “problems without passports.”<sup>68</sup> As such, pandemics are exactly the kind of issue with the mutuality of interests on which international cooperation can be built.<sup>69</sup> That the Trump administration has repeatedly violated this—withdrawing from the WHO, boycotting the EU-organized global initiative for collaborative COVID-19 vaccine development, and instead pushing sicken-thy-neighbor efforts to monopsonistically buy up potential vaccine supplies—has hurt American interests and reputation even more than China’s self-serving moves hurt its.

Of course, there is no question that the WHO needs reform. Along with its own internal issues—its own post-Ebola self-assessment acknowledging the lack of “capacity or organizational culture to deliver a full emergency public health response” was never systematically acted upon—it has two structural problems.<sup>70</sup> It has too few resources: its annual budget amounts to less than what the Pentagon spends in a day and a half. And it has too little authority: its International Health Regulations (IHR) are not binding on states for information sharing and policy coordination.<sup>71</sup> For the United States to genuinely commit to helping make the WHO more effective—e.g., not just rejoin but follow the lead of Germany and France (Germany has pledged an additional EUR 500 and France EUR 100 for its WHO budget support) to provide increased funding and build broad support for IHR strengthening and for greater independent authority for the WHO Health Emergency Program—would make pressures for greater accountability and de-politicization more credible (less political use of its UN Security Council veto would also help).<sup>72</sup>

Other mechanisms are available that add to the viability of pandemic prevention strategy. The Global Health Security Agenda is a coalition of 69 countries,

international organizations, NGOs, and private sector companies building front-line capacity for early detection and effective response. The US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Emerging Pandemic Threats Program does similar work on a bilateral targeted basis. The National Institute of Health's Fogarty International Center funds more than 500 projects bringing together American scientists with counterparts in foreign countries.<sup>73</sup> Restoring The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to what the peer-reviewed medical journal *The Lancet* calls the global "gold standard" would re-position it as the kind of central collaborator it was during the 2014–16 Ebola crisis when it worked with close to 50 other national and multilateral partners.<sup>74</sup> Public-private-nonprofit networks such as the Global Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and the Antiviral Drug Discovery and Development Center (AD3C) provide added capacity.<sup>75</sup> While policy frictions and political considerations will always exist, shared interests in avoiding another crisis like COVID-19 are a powerful incentive for countries to work together more on a sustained preventive basis because, as my colleague Steve Weber argues, "once the early warning indicators are blinking red—or even yellow—it will be too late to assemble the necessary capacity."<sup>76</sup>

While mutuality has been even harder to foster on climate change, the imminence of tipping points makes it more possible to forge a sense of shared urgency. While noting that limited fuel taxes and public transportation fare hikes set off recent riots in France (Yellow Vests) and Chile, former senior UN official Ramesh Thakur also cites polls showing climate change ranked as the greatest threat in 13 of 26 surveyed countries, more than any other issue and with a 68 percent cross-country median ranking it as a major, not minor, threat.<sup>77</sup> A July 2020 study by the World Climate Research Program drawing on multiple lines of evidence set the range of warming effects much higher than before, so much so that a NASA scientist called it a "five-alarm fire" for the planet.<sup>78</sup> Here, too, concerted action is not just up to the United States. Along with Trump renegeing on the US Paris agreement pledge, the NGO-published Climate Action Tracker deemed China's pledge "highly insufficient" and Russia's "critically insufficient"—the European Union's was better, but still "insufficient."<sup>79</sup>

There lies the challenge, but also the opportunity for the United States to demonstrate leadership: use COP-26, the major global climate change conference scheduled for November 2021 in Glasgow (postponed from 2020 by COVID-19), both to get the Paris agreement on track and to set a Paris-plus agenda. Ensure that agreements are binding and enforceable. Given the urgency of making substantial progress, the Paris 2015 formula of keeping pledges voluntary in order to achieve consensus is not sustainable. Countries still can determine how to meet commitments, but there have to be consequences for not doing so. While binding commitments did not work out in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, they largely have with

the 1989 Montreal Ozone treaty including the 2019 Kigali Amendment (American non-ratification notwithstanding).<sup>80</sup> Offer to increase contributions to the Green Climate Fund and other mechanisms for assisting the Global South consistent with the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CDR-RC), as established in the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change pending proportional matches by China, the European Union, Japan, and other major countries. And make this an opportunity for US-China cooperation a la Paris 2015. Whether it is denying the other, garnering the gain in prestige by itself, or reaping shared benefits in some G-2 collaboration that also serves broader multilateral interests, there is a strategic logic to China and the United States working together on climate change.

**T**here is a strategic logic to China and the United States working together on climate change

### **Domestic Support Base**

Pandemic and climate change prevention both have favorable polling numbers. Despite the president telling the US public not to worry, 81 percent deemed COVID-19 a national emergency, with 57 percent even analogizing it to war.<sup>81</sup> More than two months in, despite 86 percent expressing worry about the economy and 59 percent acknowledging severe economic impact, 57 percent still prioritized controlling virus spread even if hurts the economy.<sup>82</sup> Fewer people blamed the WHO (56 percent) than the Trump administration (59 percent).<sup>83</sup> Trump's own approval-disapproval on COVID-19 handling was negative: 43 percent-53 percent in early June and even lower by early July at 38 percent-58 percent.<sup>84</sup> On the question of who to trust for accurate information, with the option of choosing more than one, Trump got 26 percent while Dr. Anthony Fauci got 67 percent (even 51 percent of Republicans said yes on Fauci).<sup>85</sup>

While still facing formidable interest group opposition and denialism, climate change politics have become much more workable. A key factor is the here and now: 62 percent of the US public say they are feeling the consequences in their local communities, 54 percent that global warming is happening (in 2010, it was only 33 percent), and 62 percent that it is human-caused (in 2010, it was only 46 percent).<sup>86</sup> Close to two-thirds of the American public come out pro-green in one 2019 Pew poll question after another.<sup>87</sup> Would voters support increased federal budget spending to prevent climate change? Polls say that 55 percent say

**M**illennials are especially supportive of increased spending to prevent climate change

yes—higher than health care, Social Security, defense, and anti-terrorism—the highest since 2001.<sup>88</sup> Millennials are especially supportive. Their 68 percent support for the Paris climate agreement, 74 percent on climate change as an emergency, and 82 percent on not enough being done are all higher than any other demographic group.<sup>89</sup>

Among Republicans, when “non-Trump” or self-describing moderate Republicans are disaggregated, support for the Paris accord is 53 percent, and belief that climate change is hurting the economy is at 64 percent.<sup>90</sup> In a recent *Foreign Affairs* article, former Republican Secretaries of State George Shultz and James Baker stress not only “the overwhelming strategic advantages” in the United States being a global climate leader but also that “climate action and economic growth, far from being mutually exclusive, are not only compatible but also increasingly interdependent.”<sup>91</sup> Faith-based groups motivated by a Biblical sense of “creation care” are also providing some “purpling,” as with the Evangelical Environment Network pledge “to be faithful stewards of God’s provision . . . to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment.”<sup>92</sup>

Both pandemic and climate change prevention also have more of a domestic-international synergy than a China-centric grand strategy. Policies on these issues are not just to mobilize domestic capacities for external GPC, nor posing the butter-not-guns prioritization of domestic over international issues. Rather, they provide more of a blending than choice between domestic and international priorities. The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) of PPE (personal protective equipment) and other key supplies can be built up in ways that stimulate local manufacturing production consistent with the national security provisions of international economic regulations. University and research institutions can be further engaged through the Academic Public Health Ready Reserve Corps and the Academic Pandemic and Prevention Resource Centers Network.<sup>93</sup> Health and other structural inequalities that the intersection of the COVID-19 crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement have made undeniable can be addressed.

The climate change synergy in green (profit) versus green (environment) is increasingly shown to be a false choice. Sure, there are trade-offs, but three factors are already making it possible to be doubly green: increasing costs from the climate already changing, decreasing costs of transitioning to less greenhouse gas (GHG)-intensive production and consumption, and strong evidence of increasing economic growth including international trade competitiveness and GHG emissions going together.<sup>94</sup> The business and finance community get it. *Entrepreneur* magazine calls sustainable capitalism “the next big thing.”<sup>95</sup> In 2016, Bill Gates launched the Breakthrough Energy Ventures fund investing in clean energy technologies. In January 2020, BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager (close to US\$7 trillion) cited “evidence on climate risk . . . compelling investors to reassess core assumptions about modern finance” in moving funds

to low sustainability-risk companies.<sup>96</sup> Employees, too, want to work for companies with positive environmental reputations, resulting in better morale, higher productivity, and reduced turnover for firms with strong sustainability or corporate social responsibility programs.<sup>97</sup>

## Refocusing US Grand Strategy

I have been struck by the foreign policy/national security community discourse about COVID-19 being so much more about how it impacts GPC than about pandemic prevention as its own strategic and diplomatic challenges. These challenges, formidable in their own right, are much more about collective action and thus are that much harder to meet if the focus is on whether the United States or China “win.”

US-China policies need to get the resources, bandwidth, and creative strategizing for managing this rivalry (US-Russia as well), but pandemic and environmental mass destruction prevention (P-EMD) should be at the center of US grand strategy going forward. They constitute even more severe and imminent threats. Policies for dealing with them have greater viability with the interests of allies and partners. They are conducive to more sustainable domestic support bases. All told, they provide opportunities for the United States to play a 21st century global leadership role comparable to the best of its 20th century one.

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