

Biden's Strategic Competition Approach Towards China

Danah Alenezi¹

¹ National Security Bureau of Kuwait, Council of Ministers, Kuwait

Correspondence: Danah Alenezi, National Security Bureau of Kuwait, Council of Ministers, Kuwait. Tel: 965-6558-2264. E-mail: danah1984@icloud.com

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Abstract

Purpose- This paper aims to analysis and explore the causes of Biden's preference for the strategic competition approach to address China's threat.

Design/methodology/approach- The paper relies on the offensive realism theory as the most relevant theory to examine the US polies and approaches towards China, or US-Sino strategic competition. In particular, the theory is suited to explore Biden's preference for the strategic competition approach, and not the hostile approach. As the theory contends that the great powers are rational actors do not engage in destructive wars if the balance of power is not in their favor.

Findings- Since 2008 U.S perceives China as a most serious threat to its global hegemony. Obama and Trump's administrations have prioritized the strategic competition approach towards China, which aims at containing China's power smoothly without sliding competition to the level of severe hostility. Biden maintained this approach and also, reinforced it to avoid as much as possible major hostility with China. Through, for instance, rallying alliances and multilateralism. Based on that, the study suggests the U.S will prioritize this approach unless China upsets the existing balance by annexing Taiwan or taking full control of the South China Sea.

Originality/value -The significance of the paper emanates from providing an in-depth analysis and explanation of the cause of the conflict or the cold war between China and the United States, and the main policies and approaches that the United States adopt to deal with China.

Keywords: China, US, Competition, Taiwan, Biden, Offensive Realism

1. Introduction

In particular, confronting China's threat has occupied a large space in the context of the electoral debate between Biden and Trump. Even stranger than that, despite Biden's fierce criticism of Trump's policies under the America First Approach. However, when it comes to China, he described it as a strategic competitor and the main challenge of U.S as Trump did. Furthermore, the Biden administration has maintained many of Trump's policies towards China. Generally, it continued the strategic competition approach of Trump but through relatively different policies and tactics.

Biden's continuation of Trump's strategic competition approach, which, indeed, Trump inherited from Obama. Reveals that confronting or undermining China's growing power has become the utmost strategic aim of U.S. Rather, it is a goal that transcends a deep partisan divide in U.S. Given, the extreme danger posed by China's rise to US hegemony over the international system. This perception finds support in the offensive realism theory that contends that the huge rise of a revisionist power will be met with very violent resistance by the global dominant. That could end in a military confrontation to maintain the status quo or the hegemony status.

Nevertheless, the study argues that U.S preference for the strategic competition approach towards China, particularly by the Biden administration affirms that U.S does not want this competition to descend into an open level of extreme hostility that leads to a military confrontation. Furthermore, the study argues that the Biden administration has fully encouraged this approach based on the conviction that it is the most appropriate to undermine China's power, especially via rallying alliances. Lastly, the study argues that U.S will prefer this approach in the future unless China upsets the existing balance by annexing Taiwan or taking full control of the South China Sea. To test these hypotheses the study adopts the offensive realism theory as an appropriate analytical approach.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *China's Threat to U.S Global Hegemony from the Lens of Offensive Realism*

Following the end of the Cold War era, the international system has been characterized by unipolarity. The U.S has become the sole superpower in the world. During this period, the U.S paid not much attention to China as a potential threat to its global primacy. Because of the huge gap in power between the two countries. Furthermore, China avoided as much as possible to reveal any indications or intentions suggesting the desire for global hegemony (Fan, 2021, p. 238).

Nevertheless, offensive realism contends that the international system can't enjoy a state of stability or peacefulness for a long time, especially if it is characterized by unipolarity. Because there are revisionist powers dissatisfied with the status quo of the international system, or seeking hegemony, they wait for the opportune time to challenge or replace it (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 29).

Ironically, offensive realists have long been viewing China, in particular, as the most dissatisfied power on the status quo of the international system. It is a revisionist power that seeks a global hegemony on basis of historical, ideological and power considerations, but it waits for the right time to challenge U.S hegemony (Mathews, 2019 p. 6). Mearsheimer argues that China will seek through its growing economic might to be a military might, and to be a regional hegemony in Asia at the expense of U.S's overwhelming presence in Asia (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Almost since 2008, the U.S began to reconsider China as a real threat to its hegemony. This was due to several reasons such as narrowing the gap in the balance of economic power between the two countries. Also due to the remarkable improvement in China's global image. After China dazzled the world with an unprecedented organization of the Olympic games in 2008 (Larres, 2022, p. 131). Perhaps the most dangerous is the relative change in China's policy on very sensitive issues, especially towards the South China Sea and Taiwan (Alenezi, 2020).

When President Xi Jinping came to power in China in 2013, the U.S was assured that China under this president is an explicit revisionist power going ahead to challenge U.S or replace it to be the new global leader. Motivated by his ambitions and the huge rise of China's economic and diplomatic power. The beginning was when he announced the challenging principle "new type of great power relationship between major countries in the twenty-first century" during his meeting with President Obama in 2012. As well as initiating the "China dream" initiative in which he elaborated on his dream to be China a global power. Since he came to the power, Xi Jinping shifted the traditional smooth of China's foreign policy to be more assertive, especially towards China's core interests. He also doubled the Chinese armament budget for establishing a very powerful and modern army. On the other hand, he initiated the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a very gigantic global strategy estimated at one billion US dollars to solidify China's geopolitical influence. Moreover, he announced the founding of the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to challenge the global liberal system led-U.S (Nathan, 2021, 389; Larres, 2022, 130-132).

From the perspective of offensive realism, to maintain its global hegemony. the dominant can't permit a rising revisionist power to grab the global hegemony. In particular, Mearsheimer predicted that the U.S will never permit China to become a global hegemony. It will seek in every possible way to contain or weaken China's rise (Alenezi, 2020).

Based on that, U.S-Sino relations since Xi Jinping has fully shifted from "strategic engagement to strategic competition". The world really has been witnessing a new cold war between U.S and China (Zhang & Xu, 2021, p. 324). Obama administration launched the 'Pivot to Asia' strategy in 2011 to confront or contain China's rise in Asia. Consistent with that, the National Military Strategy of 2015 has described China as a competitor. Likewise, Trump adopted very harsh policies towards China for the same aim, which led to a sharp decline in the relations between the two countries. Where National Security Strategy of 2017, and the 2018 National Defense Strategy of 2018 have acknowledged the competition with China (O'Rourke, 2022, 1-2). Accordingly, the continuation of the democratic Biden administration's strategic competition towards China can be explained as a reaction to growing China's serious threat to U.S global hegemony.

2.2 *Biden's Administration's Vision towards China*

The best tough approach to confronting China has been the subject of great competition between Biden and Trump during the 2020 presidential election campaign. In the view of both candidates, China is the main responsible for some issues that harmed the U.S like the trade deficit, which necessitates a serious confrontation with China. However, this competitive discourse reflects the U.S public deeper perception of the serious threat

imposed by China to the U.S global hegemony (Aldalala, 2021, 8).

The imperative to confront or contain China as a serious threat to the U.S hegemony is one of a few issues that the bipartisan agree upon. Rather, it can be said that it has transcended the bipartisan competition to become a major strategic direction of the U.S strategy, especially since Xi Jinping's rise to power (Biscop and Gromyko 2020, 2). Similarly, U.S public opinion's negative view of China is on the rise, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. That provides strong support to U.S administration's strategic competition towards China (Fan, 2021, 237).

In April 2020, Biden penned an article in the "foreign affairs" journal in which he pointed out that China represents a serious challenge to the U.S global leadership. Considering that China exerts extensive efforts to expand its global influence and to impose its own political and economic model. Hence, Biden affirmed that the U.S. should be more assertive in its future competition with China (Biden 2020). Biden repeated the same words in his first foreign policy speech. Where he described China as the most dangerous competitor, which requires serious competition by the U.S against China in all domains, including technology and global governance (Zhang & Xu, 2021, 345).

In his testimony in Congress that was the day before Biden was officially inaugurated as president. Antony Blinken has said that China represents "the most significant challenge to the U.S.". According to him, China under Xi Jinping is more explicit and firmer to becoming the global leader and posing its standards and model on the world (Larres, 2022, 135).

Based on that, the Biden administration announced in February 2021 the establishment of the Pentagon's China Task Force, its task is focused on studying and evaluating all the defence policies and programs related to China in the Pentagon, and making final recommendations on dealing with China as the main challenge to U.S (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021).

In march 2021, the Biden administration released Interim National Security Strategic Guidance which acknowledged that the U.S in a strategic competition with China. As it is the only power that can challenge the stability of the international system due to its growing comprehensive power, which also rendered it more assertive. Thus, the guidance has stressed the reinforcement of the U.S army to be ready to face China's growing assertiveness. Furthermore, it stressed the strengthening of the U.S partnerships with its alliances and enhancing the U.S economy to prevent China from seizing the international order (White House, 2021b). In this regard, Biden requested congress to increase defence spending by nearly 12 billion for the fiscal year 2022. Biden administration attempted to justify this increase being a priority to confront China the biggest challenge to Pentagon (Parry, 2021, 4).

2.3 Biden's Strategic Competition Approach Towards China

In the first US-Sino official summit in Alaska in March 2021, after Biden took office, Blinken said publicly to China's officials "United States' relationship with China will be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, adversarial where it must be..... Our intent is to be direct about our concerns, direct about our priorities, with the goal of a more clear-eyed relationship between our countries moving forward". For his part, the national security adviser Sullivan said, "We do not seek conflict, but we welcome stiff competition and we will always stand up for our principles, for our people and our friends" (Transcript of U.S-China opening remarks in Alaska, 2021).

Obviously from the above, the Biden administration was very careful from the beginning to send a message to China that our relations will be shaped within the intense competition only. This is what Biden reiterated during the first virtual meeting with the Chinese president in November 2021, when he said "our responsibility as leaders of China and the United States is to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended. Just simple, straightforward competition" (White House, 2021d).

US's attempts to contain China, or U.S-Sino severe competition for global hegemony, does not necessarily mean that it will turn into a strong antagonism or sharp conflict that quickly develops into a military confrontation. The last option is possible but it may be a last resort when things develop to a very dangerous level. That's why, not only Biden seeks to run the relations on basis of competition, but also Obama and Trump strove for that. Such a competition could be considered a smooth containment for China. Using all economic and diplomatic tools and policies to deal with China from a standpoint of strength, and press, and force it to consider and respect U.S's interests and values. As well as, considering some of China's interests and creating areas for cooperation, so that the relations don't veer into Zero-sum hostility. In this vein, the Biden administration stressed the significance of cooperation with China on some global issues, especially climate change and Covid-19 (Heer, 2021, 8).

Because disregarding this aspect may shift competition to harsh hostility as happened during Trump. The latter adopted the strategic competition approach towards China. However, it was akin to confrontation or hostility as the Trump administration did not maintain any margin of cooperation. In this respect, Blinken said that the strategic competition with China under Biden will be entirely different from Trump. The competition with China in some vital issues does not at all prevent cooperation in other issues and domains (Qingguo, 2021, 6-7).

In this vein, amid the dangerous escalation of the global warming crisis in the summer of 2021, the two countries have pledged to intensify their cooperation to confront the crisis during the Glasgow Climate Summit (Zhao, 2022).

In short, like his predecessors, Biden preferred strategic competition with China, not severe confrontation or hostility. Therefore, he chose to run this competition by focusing on quiet containment policies such as rallying alliances and economic and diplomatic pressures (Kim *et al.* 2021). Also, he may be more eager for such an approach than his predecessors, motivated by the necessity of addressing the domestic crises caused by Covid-19 and the sharp social and political division that weakened U.S power vs. China (Russel & Cutler, 2022).

Indeed, the strategic competition approach corresponds to the offensive realism that argues that superpowers are rational actors who don't engage in very harsh policies or confrontations when the balance of power is not in their favour. Despite U.S seeking to undermine China's power to maintain its global primacy. Nevertheless, it realizes that the balance of military power is not fully in its favour. Thus, it chooses soft or smooth containment as it did with the Soviet Union so that avoiding a military confrontation with China, which consequences will be very dire for both countries and the world as well.

3. Biden's Policies towards China within the Strategic Competition

3.1 Rallying Alliances

According to Biden, building a united front with the allies and partners is the most effective approach to confront China's challenge. Indeed, Trump's reluctance to multilateralism under the America First approach has given China a golden chance to enlarge its influence worldwide (Biden, 2020). The Strategic competition approach towards China is undoubtedly agreed upon by Republicans and Democrats. However, the most important thing that distinguishes Biden in the context of his approach is his appreciation of multilateralism and rallying alliances (West, 2021).

In Biden's belief multilateralism or rallying alliances is an effective approach to contain China. Because a wide powerful alliance between U.S and its partners will certainly force China to adjust its choices and policies in all domains (Heer, 2021, 9). Additionally, alliances contribute to bolstering U.S global influence or leadership, which dispel China's growing perception regarding the decline of U.S power. That aggravated after U.S Failed Management of the Corona Crisis, and the Shameful Withdrawal from Afghanistan (Haenle, 2021). Furthermore, Biden may realize that U.S needs alliances because it is really unable alone to face China. Also, rallying alliances reduces the probability of a devastating military confrontation with China, which is consistent with the strategic competition approach.

Biden sought to rally allies against China very early. He worked to form a powerful bilateral front against China with Canada during his first meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Also, in his first call with the Japanese Prime Minister, Biden reaffirmed U.S's commitment to defend Japan's maritime sovereign rights that face violent harassment from China (Sun, 2021, 20-21). In the same vein, Biden aspired to elevate the alliance with South Korea into a comprehensive strategic partnership for an effective confrontation with China. In this respect, the joint summit statement of presidents Biden and Moon in 2021 denounced China's practices in the South China Sea and Taiwan (Nam & Song, 2022, 84).

Rallying the Europeans against China was Biden's top priority on his first visit to Europe. Biden during this visit sought to build a united front of democracies or a 'democracies alliance' that can resist China's commercial and human rights violations. Accordingly, containing China's growing influence (Zhao 2021,3). In the virtual Munich Security Conference of 2021, Biden explicitly stated that strengthening our joint work with our democratic partners in Europe and Indo-Pacific represents the main pillar of the long-term strategic competition and stiff with China (White House, 2021a).

On the impact of the cohesion of the alliance with the Europeans, Biden proposed the Build Back Better World initiative during the G7 summit in June 2021. As a counter initiative to China's BRI project, which has permitted China to extensively enlarge its global influence. Therefore, the initiative may represent one of Biden's most important strategic steps to forge an economic alliance against China in the context of the strategic competition approach. Especially, since China's global economic expansion has begun to frighten Europeans (Zhao, 2021,

248-249).

On the other hand, the Biden administration worked to cement the partnership with ASEAN after Trump's negligence to weaken China's solid ties with ASEAN. Also, to assure the ASEAN countries that US's efforts to bolster the QUAD alliance don't detract U.S.'s focus from ASEAN, but rather the two organizations complete each other. During the annual U.S.-ASEAN Summit 2021, Biden pledged the "centrality" of ASEAN (Stromseth, 2022). Trump's negligence has motivated or forced ASEAN as well as Japan, South Korea and India to join Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) led by China, which challenged Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) led by U.S (Russel & Cutler, 2022).

Biden has continued his efforts to further cement the partnership with ASEAN by working to upgrade the partnership to "a comprehensive strategic partnership the same level as ASEAN's ties with China" during U.S-ASEAN summit in May 2022. Biden's efforts come amid the intensification of the Ukraine war, which indicates that the focus on containing China is much more important than Russia's threat, and Europe's security (Murphy, 2022).

3.2 Biden's Indo-pacific strategy

Indo-pacific strategy is not a new strategic focus of U.S. Trump administration put forward it as an alternative or modified model of Obama's rebalance strategy to Asia and the Pacific of 2009. US's target of such strategy is to contain China's comprehensive power by forming the largest possible number of political, economic and military alliances in Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

According to offensive realism, global dominance is threatened when a power seeks to be a regional hegemony. Because once established this hegemony is the way to be global dominant will be very easy. Thus, the dominant will focus all his efforts to prevent this power to be regional hegemony. This premise explains US's focus on Asia and the Pacific through the Indo-pacific strategy to contain China's serious efforts for complete hegemony in Asia (Araszkiwicz, 2021, 299).

Trump administration launched the Indo-pacific strategy that included India, Japan and Australia. However, it wasn't successful enough to confront China thanks to Trump's unilateral approach in confronting China and the Trump administration's tensions with U.S's allies, especially Japan due to Trump's isolationist approach. Biden not only inherited the Indo-Pacific strategy but he also strives to develop it to the maximum degree (Dong, 2021, 10).

According to U.S Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2022, "Under President Biden, the United States is determined to strengthen our long-term position in and commitment to the Indo-Pacific. We will focus on every corner of the region". This is partly to face China's growing challenge as China "is combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world's most influential power" (White House, 2022).

It is evident that Biden's new powerful strategy in Indo-Pacific came against the backdrop of the warnings of Pentagon annual reports on the Chinese military of 2021. Which indicated that China was able to narrow the military gap with U.S. China's excessive assertive behaviour in the East and the South China Sea and China's growing maritime power. As well as China's growing financial and diplomatic influence worldwide through the Belt and Road Initiative (Nathan, 2021, 389). Further, China seeks to develop a striking naval force and expand its dominance beyond its territorial waters. Thus, Chinese strategists view the Indo-Pacific strategy as a containment strategy for China (Yinhong, 2022b,4).

3.3 Reviving Of Quad and new AUKUS alliance within Indo-pacific strategy

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is a security dialogue that was founded in 2007 between four countries: the U.S, India, Japan and Australia to mainly undermine China's rise. Besides other aims, including ensuring a free and open order in the Pacific. Quad held its first joint naval exercise in 2007 "Malabar", which was hugely denounced by China (Zongyou & Yunhan, 2021, 12).

Reviving QUAD was part of Trump's policies in confronting China. However, QUAD under Trump has not been effective enough in facing China. It was mere "a talk shop and diplomatic manoeuvre" due to Trump's unilateral approach to confronting China. Biden not only revived QUAD but also sought to develop it into an institutional powerful forum. Biden upgraded it to the leaders' level. QUAD leaders also agreed to hold an annual meeting and founding new working groups (Zongyou & Yunhan, 2021,13-14).

In this way, Biden has transformed QUAD into a powerful and coherent deterrent coalition to confront China's rising power in Asia. The solid coordination between the U.S, India, Japan and Australia will inevitably deter

China's assertive stances towards Taiwan and the South China Sea. In the first leader summit of QUAD under Biden in March 2021, the name of China was not mentioned in particular. However, the summit made firm assertions regarding Taiwan and the East and South China Seas. The leaders of the summit have vowed specifically to support "freedom of navigation, and peaceful resolution of disputes". Also, pledged to face the challenge of the maritime rules in the East and South China Seas. The solid coordination would also undermine China's rising economic and technical power. Especially QUAD aims to include new members (Rudd, 2022, 45-48; White House, 2021c).

Not long after reviving QUAD, Biden announced on September 2021 the establishment of the new trilateral security alliance "AUKUS" with the UK and Australia. This alliance constitutes a serious development in Indo-pacific and in terms of countering China since it works to enhance nuclear deterrence against China's growing military presence in Indo-pacific. Within AUKUS U.S and UK will provide Australia with nuclear submarines able to deter China's maritime expansion (Strategic Annual Report, 2021).

China's threat contributed to bolstering AUKUS. Australia has been suffering since the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis from China's provocative practices, especially in the trading domain (Russel and Cutler 2022). Similarly, the participation of the UK would suggest the EU's rising tendency to bolster its presence in Indo-pacific for countering China's threat (Yinhong, 2022a, 2).

Biden had initiated AUKUS not for provoking China's military escalation but for bolstering deterrence against China. The latter also a rational actor has responded to AUKUS by hastening the establishment of a China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in November 2021. Being a rational actor, China believes that the persistence of a calm neighbouring environment and economic engagement are the main pillars to resist the U.S in the Pacific (Dong, 2021, 10).

3.4 Continuation of Trade and Technology War

The trade war has been one of the most important of Trump's tools to undermine China's economy. Given that China's rise and power highly rely on its economic growth. On the other hand, Trump sought to narrow the wide gap of U.S debt owed to China, which is estimated at more than one trillion dollars (Xing & Meza, 2021, 12-13).

Surprisingly, despite Biden's harsh criticism of Trump's approach toward China. On the other hand, Trump's trade and tech war have hurt several US companies and increased unemployment and prices (Qingguo, 2021,6). However, he maintained Trump's trade policy toward China, in particular tariffs on Chinese products. Even some of Biden's officials have praised Trump's trade war on China as an effective and legitimate tool to protect U.S economy (Zongyou & Yunhan, 2021, 4).

In his first meeting with the Chinese president, Biden has shown a strong willingness to safeguard the U.S works and industries from what he described that China's unfair trade and economic practices (White House, 2021d). In the same context, USTR specified confronting "China's coercive and unfair economic trade practices through a comprehensive strategy" as one of the main priorities of the Biden Administration in 2021 (Parry, 2021, 5).

Technology has emerged strongly as one of the new domains of U.S-Sino rivalry during Trump. By 2020 China managed to outpace U.S in some fields of high-tech and communications such as mobile networks. And in other fields such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors and green energy China is seriously competing with U.S. China's global primacy in the tech domain will greatly shift the balance of power in its favour as military development has become greatly relies on the high-tech. In addition to the huge financial gains, as well as the huge global influence obtained from tech sales. That's why Trump launched a war on Chinese technology companies. Similarly, Biden is on the same path (Allison et al., 2021, 2).

Trump administration banned dealing with China's major tech companies such as Huawei, ZTE, and TikTok. Biden administration did not only remove this ban but also adopted the Trump administration's review to tighten severe restrictions on China's tech under the comprehensive national security rules. Accordingly, the Biden administration is working to impose stricter restrictions regarding dealing with China's tech companies. For instance, it imposed strict restrictions on U.S companies regarding granting the required licenses for exporting any components to Huawei that could be used in developing G5. More importantly, in march 2021, "the U.S. Federal Communications Commission designated five Chinese tech firms as posing an unacceptable risk to national security", including Huawei and ZTE (Rudd, 2022,41-42).

3.5 Human Rights and Democracy

Except for the Trump era, advocacy of human rights and democracy is persistent leverage of the U.S against China. In the context of the U.S-Sino strategic competition, Biden has given high priority to this issue (Tanaka, 2021, 2). That was very evident in his presidential campaign when he denounced China's grave abuses against

the Muslim Uighur minority. That was described by his foreign minister Blinken as "genocide" and vowed to ban the U.S exports that were used in the genocide. Also, in his first call with the Chinese president, Biden stressed halting crackdowns on democratic protesters in Hong Kong (Wani & Parpiani, 2021,9).

Biden's unique step in this respect is calling for forging a democratic alliance to confront China's absolutism. That's on the basis that shared liberal values make alliances more powerful and cohesive (Nam & Song, 2022, 81). That, also, in return, will tip the balance of U.S in a framework of the international influence struggle with China. As most of China's friends and foes are also democracies (Nathan, 2022).

For Biden, using the democracy issue constitutes a very effective weapon to tarnish China's image globally as it is hostile to freedoms. also, to cause a rift between China and its allies. This is a while that China strives enthusiastically to promote itself as a responsible great power (Dong, 2021, 13). Also, to champion its own political system "one-party system" that contributed to China's rise and the Chinese people's welfare. Based on that the question of democracy and human rights under Biden, in particular, are mere small interfaces to huge ideological U.S-Sino rivalry (International Crisis Group, 2020).

For this reason, the Biden administration sought to deal a severe blow to China with its official announcement in December 2021, boycotting the winter Olympics games of 2022 to be held in China, against the backdrop of the continuation of abuses against the Muslim Uighur minority (Strategic Annual Report, 2021). The announcement was accompanied by U.S sanctions against China's Sense Time company involved in developing software used in violations against Muslim Uighur (Conrad, 2021).

The most important for Biden, and the most dangerous for China, is to delegitimize the ruling Communist Party of China, which considers western values are the most serious threat to its staying in the power. That's why, China formulates the West's advocacy of democracy and human rights to the Chinese as a challenge to China's national security, and as a pretext to intervene in China's internal affairs (Strategic Annual Report, 2021).

3.6 Taiwan and South China Sea (SCS)

The continuation of US global hegemony inevitably entails U.S to persist a powerful maritime influence in SCS and China's non-annexation of Taiwan. Vice versa, no global hegemony for China without full dominance of Taiwan and SCS. Due to, inter alia, their very vital strategic site, which enables world maritime dominance.

Trump pursued a position towards Taiwan that relatively deviated from US's traditional policy towards Taiwan since US-Sino normalization relations in 1979. This is in terms of, for instance, the increase in arms sales and the passing "Taiwan Travel Act" relating to the official visits between US and Taiwan (Weiqun, 2022).

Taiwan's officials and many observers have expected that Biden's presidency will be a return to US traditional policy towards Taiwan. As he was Obama's vice, more importantly, he didn't articulate a specific vision towards Taiwan during his presidential campaign. However, it turns out from his first day in office that Biden pursues a position towards Taiwan tougher than his predecessor to forestall China's endeavour for unification. Despite Biden's commitment to the "one China" policy. He invited Taiwan's de facto ambassador to U.S for attending the presidential inauguration ceremony for the first time since 1979 (Kuehn, 2021, 5-6).

In his first meeting with Xi Jinping, Biden underscored that "the United States strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (White House, 2021d). Biden also has bolstered the unofficial ties with Taiwan. In June 2021, a delegation from congress visited Taiwan for the first time since 1995, which greatly angered China (Greve, 2021, 4).

Biden's tough measures have led China to think that Biden's commitment to a "one China" policy or status quo is not honest. Because his measures suggest encouraging Taiwan to claim independence (International Crisis Group, 2020). Therefore, China challenged Biden through the continuation to challenge the status quo by penetrating China's fighters into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone and conducting military exercises in south Taiwan. Biden administration, in return, immediately declared US's unwavering commitment to Taiwan's defence and sent a carrier battle group into the Taiwan Strait. Further, it approved selling advanced submarines to Taiwan (Rudd, 2022, 35).

As evident, U.S-Sino tension over Taiwan under Biden is unprecedented. This confirms Biden's solid endeavour to bolster Taiwan's independence, or at least to maintain the status quo. This is clearly reflected in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2022, which encourages Taiwan's participation in the 2022 Pacific Rim military exercise, and bolsters the military cooperation between the National Guard and Taiwan. Further, enhancing Taiwan's international political and economic engagement to mitigate Taiwan's international isolation as well as to undermine China's pressures and coercion (Grieger, 2022).

In a nutshell, it is evident from Biden's measures, especially the recent ones in 2022 that Biden is very assertive to deter China's endeavour for unification. However, he does not seek a very dangerous escalation in light of the strategic competition approach. In other words, he strives to ensure the best safe and comprehensive deterrence, including diplomacy and alliances (Yinhong, 2022a, 2).

According to offensive realism, Both US and China are rational actors attempting not to bring the tension over Taiwan and the South China Sea to such a high degree, which leads them to a dire armed conflict. Nevertheless, the possibility of the latter is not excluded in the long run. Especially, Taiwan for China is a very core interest that cannot be conceded. In this vein, Biden is the first US president ever to unravel the strategic ambiguity around Taiwan. With his clear statement after the Ukrainian war about the full readiness of U.S to use military force to defend Taiwan if it is invaded by China (Wei qun, 2022).

China has been working since 2008 to alter the status quo in SCS. By, for instance, building islands and military bases in the disputed maritime territories. That extensively heightened U.S concerns (O'Rourke, 2022, 1). China's offensive strategy in SCS since 2008 was one of the main driving reasons for Obama to launch the rebalance strategy to Asia in 2009. And solidifying the operations of freedom of navigation in SCS. Because China's full dominance over SCS will render it a regional hegemony in Asia. This is also argued by offensive realists, including Mearsheimer (Alenezi 2020). Therefore, it was not surprising that Trump took a more confrontational policy in SCS than Obama, especially the increase of the operations of freedom of navigation (Singh, 2018, 8).

Biden has adopted a tougher approach than Trump to curb China's growing activities in SCS. Only in his first year in power, Pentagon has conducted six freedom of navigation operations in SCS (Ha & Storey, 2022, 8). Consistent with that, the Biden administration rejected China's maritime claims in SCS and warned China of a military response if it attacked the Philippines in the disputed maritime territories (Edelman 2021). Also, Blinken said that "We'll continue to oppose Beijing's aggressive and unlawful activities in the South and East China Seas.... Beijing's claims in the South China Sea have no basis in international law.....we'll continue to fly and sail wherever international law allows" (Blinken, 2022).

US's escalation towards Taiwan and SCS has begun since Obama, and Biden's position is tougher than his predecessors in a response to China's assertive position. More specifically, to prevent China to be a regional hegemony. However, none of them sought a very dangerous escalation in light of the strategic competition approach. Likewise, Taiwan Biden's tougher approach in SCS does not reflect his tendency to escalate the tension with China, but rather to empower an effective deterrence against China. Therefore, his approach included also multilateral diplomacy and alliances formation in SCS and its surrounding, including the QUAD alliance (Touran et al., 2021, 97). Blinken confirmed that "We'll work with allies and partners to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight, which has enabled the region's prosperity for decades" (Blinken, 2022).

4. Conclusions

Since 2008, China has become the most serious threat to US world leadership. For this reason, the main strategic priority of U.S which transcends the deep bipartisan divide has become to work to weaken or contain the Chinese threat. Therefore, it is not surprising that Biden continues Obama and Trump's strategic competition approach towards China. These conclusions resonate with offensive realism theory that argues that the global hegemon will never hesitate to take containment strategies against the threatening revisionist power.

The strategic competition approach towards China, particularly under Biden does not prioritize the military option, but rather comes as an inevitable last option if China turns the balance of power upside down through its occupation of Taiwan or its complete domination in SCS. That also complies with offensive realism's logic, which says military confrontation is the last option of the rational big powers when the balance of power is greatly compromised.

Biden's strategic competition approach towards China is differentiated by its comprehensive and sobriety. It greatly focuses more than its predecessors on alliances and employing human rights and democracy as effective smooth strategies to undermine China's influence. On the other hand, Biden continued Trump's the trade and tech war. Lastly, he adopted a more assertive policy than Obama and Trump towards Taiwan and SCS.

Here, two main observations stand out. The first is that U.S escalation and firmness towards China are steadily increasing, especially towards Taiwan and SCS. The second is the presence of new circles and areas that are constantly added within U.S-Sino global rivalry, such as tech and the new silk road.

Biden's top priority to undermine China's power has proved that the current atmosphere of China-US relations is a real cold war for global hegemony, similar to U.S-Soviet Union past cold war. Based on that, undermining

China will remain a top priority for any upcoming US administrations in the future. It is expected that these administrations will pursue or prefer the strategic competition approach. Unfortunately, however, a military clash with a very strong, stubborn and ambitious opponent such as China is not excluded.

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