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Title	<i>American-Sino Relations: Competition</i>
Description	Second part of the three part series. This episode looks at four areas where the two most powerful nations can be in competition or in conflict; exceptionalism, contrasting political systems, power perceptions and shifts in the power relationships
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R. Foot: So having outlined in brief three areas where working together would be beneficial to global politics, my next task in this second section is to illustrate four conditions that complicate the attempts to work cooperatively.

Exceptionalism in both the US and China, which I'll explain in more detail later.

Secondly, contrasting political systems and problems of policy implementation in both polities.

Thirdly, perceptions of power and shifts in their relative power positions, and finally mutual strategic distrust.

First of all, exceptionalism. Applied to the US the concept of exceptionalism is well understood if I quote another couple of authors on this topic exceptionalism is based on a self perception that America differs qualitatively from other developed nations because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution and distinctive political and religious institutions. One consequence can be that the US assumes its national values and practices are universally valid and its policy positions are moral and proper and not just expedient.

This gives it a right or more accurately a duty many US administrations have believed to enforce and interpret the rules of global order that others are expected to obey.

But I would suggest that the Chinese also have exceptionalist tendencies based on their long civilisation, the concept of honour embedded in the idea of tribute and a strong hand cultural identity. Imperial tradition dictated the prime goals of the emperor to be to preside over a stable and harmonious order and to overall all others when they beheld the fruits of this order, the economy, the arts, philosophy and so on. This sense of uniqueness of a capacity to all others were the glories of cynic culture makes partnership and equality that much more difficult to contemplate. It reinforces the sense of victimhood and sense of wrong that China developed as a result of the actions of a predatory west in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These perceptions underpin some of China's sensitivity to diplomatic and public criticism.

International image, perhaps one should even call it respect matters to China in a way that arguably is not as true of many other countries. Now the drawbacks of this exceptionalist framing in both societies are many, it means both have tended to see their actions in world politics as virtuous, which make accepting the validity of the others point of view difficult. The US in particular as a consequence of its overwhelming power in the post 45 era has more readily been able to act on this exceptionalist premise. It has perceived itself as the custodian of the rules of global order in this

period and has been more able than China to put its interpretations of those rules into operation. This is an uncomfortable position for a state such as China.

My second factor relates to political systems and policy implementation. Depictions of China and the United States tend to pit an authoritarian one party state with a well developed means of surveillance and repression against a participatory electoral democracy where citizens are active in enforcing constitution rights and where interest groups and civil society have many points of access to the political process.

I'm not trying to suggest that China has undertaken no political reforms, clearly it has it has established an norm of term limits, age limits for top office holders, it has sanctioned a debate on increasing inner party democracy and on methods of rooting out corruption. The leadership is more responsive to public attitude, the Chinese Communist Party tries to legitimate its rule not just impose its rule by arguing that it is form of democracy is designed to give primacy to beneficial economic outcomes over political process and that it will protect China's honour in international negotiations.

But the way it has dealt with minority issues in Tibet, in Sin Yang, as we human right activist and other social critics are reminders that its rule can be harsh and unyielding. Neither Beijing nor Washington much likes what it sees in terms of the others polity and irritants and misperceptions arising from the domestic level will remain prominent in the relationship. But beyond those differences in values are questions that relate to decentralisation of power in both political systems.

Decentralisation means sometimes that implementation of some of the bilateral agreements that they reach or which involve both in crucial global order questions of kinds I've talked about is particularly challenging. In the US, diffusion of power among the different branches of government can result in outcomes unexpected by those overseas governments less familiar with its political system. A couple of examples include the Kyoto protocol and the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. The Clinton administration signed both of these accords but was unable to muster the necessary 67 votes in the US senate and therefore never ratified these agreements.

China's political system is paradoxically both authoritarian and highly decentralised with a large proportion of governmental officials working at the local level. In addition the workings of the market and the transfer of resources to the localities has meant that implementation of policy is often in hands far from the centre. There are five levels of government to negotiate and this puts enormous demands on the central government as it tries to keep local level incentives and interests in line with those policy preferences expressed in Beijing.

To give just one example, environmental policy. It's been difficult to establish local support for directives from the centre for example from 2002 to 2004 one analyst recorded 70 thousand violations of environmental laws being actually reported to the centre. But only 500 were addressed. In most cases the explanation was that the local government was much more concerned to increase levels of production and employment and thus would protect the local firm from higher level retribution. Now why I raise this is because if partnership depends on predictability, reciprocity and living up to commitments in order to built trust then the domestic systems are to some degree impediments to that end.

My third factor relates to power; transitions of power, perceptions of power. Some theorists of international relations have argued that the danger of war is at its height when a power transition is about to take place. When a dissatisfied rising power catches up and begins to overtake the dominant state in the system. That contender in these circumstances is deemed likely to spark a conflict. The rise of Germany from the end of the 19th century is often cited as the prime example both because of Germany's increasing material resources and also because of its sense of dissatisfaction with its position in the global hierarchy.

The United States has long been the preponderant power in the global system and has played a central role in shaping the post 1945 institutional behavioural order. Few expect a shift in the

distribution of power in China's favour to be an easy adjustment for America which has long enjoyed great strategic latitude in political and military action. Some of the power indicators suggest this transition is in fact well under way the, US share of world trade in global GDP had declined from 16 % and 30% respectively in 1999 to 11% and 23% in 2008 with China's relative increases largely responsible for that US decline.

China's GDP in 2009 in purchasing power parity terms makes it a relatively close second to the US and nearly twice the size of Japan. Whereas China enjoyed growth rates of some 10% between 2000 and 2007 the US only managed about a quarter of that. As I said earlier Beijing's economic strategy has given it the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world at a time when the US hold the largest debt.

China is the world's most rapidly developing economy and is now seen as key driver of that economy and some contend that China's soft power has risen particularly at a time when US policies were eroding America's own and then there are China's steadily rising defence budgets.

Whenever another double digit increase in China's military expenditure is announced the reaction in parts of the US government and elsewhere is that China is catching up to the point where it now has the second largest defence budget in the world. Sino American naval clashes in the South China Sea in early 2009 and Beijing's commitment to the development of a blue water navy provide the concrete grounds for this perspective.

Chinese officials and other commentators also tend to send contradictory messages in relation to their country's power and this reinforces the sense that China might be dissatisfied with its global status. At times of great strategic uncertainty it becomes even more important to send signals that are clear and consistent, but China is often unclear. For example Beijing's states that it is or it aims to be a responsible great power but it is also a member of the developing world and much weaker than the gross figures imply. Beijing often states that it can't be expected to do more in terms of its provision of global public goods because it has many material and social burdens to satisfy at home and because it hasn't been given its rightful status in global institutions such as the IMF.

But attempts to give China a greater role and set of responsibilities while welcome at one level also spur in some commentators in China a sense that they are being asked to bare responsibilities that they are not yet ready for.

Although these contradictory messages reflect in some respects the reality that is China a nation of four hundred million living in reasonable comfort and nine hundred million living in conditions we associate with the developing world. They also reinforce a perception of China's discomfort with global order and yet there is great uncertainty in Beijing born of a lack of a domestic consensus behind its current and future strategy.

My forth factor which constrains cooperation is mutual strategic distrust. It has long been a feature of the relationship and it will continue into the future. Many Chinese elite express a sense of vulnerability with respect to the US based on a belief that Washington will not allow China to continue rising. Various scenarios are envisaged that US will seek to deny China access to energy and other resources that it needs to continue its path to wealth and power or that Washington will place obstacles in the way of completing its historical project of reunification with Taiwan.

[[Huang Gee Sur]] a noted commentator in China on the China/US relationship has noted that some in China view its resurgence as futile unless this reunification with Taiwan is completed.

Climate change is another lens through which we can view this distrust given the Chinese argument that I've referred to a while back that the main US goal has been to increase its costs via adoption of new technologies and also to form a wedge between China and other members of the G77 negotiating coalition.

The US for its part perceives in China's military modernisation and in some of its political actions a project potentially to deny the American military free access to the seas and the bases of its

Asian allies that are so important to America's global military presence. Some in the US also believe that China seeks to deny Washington membership in Asia Pacific regional groupings were matters of import to the US are often discussed.

As US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg put it in 2009 "China must reassure the rest of the world that its development in growing global role will not come at the expense of security and wellbeing of others while China like any nation" he said "has the right to provide for its security its capabilities and its actions also heighten its responsibility to reassure others that this build up does not present a threat".

So these are four issues that complicate Sino American cooperation in the next section I shall examine these factors in greater depth.

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