

Engaging in the Discourse on U.S.-China Strategic Competition

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From September 26 to 28, a conference titled *“Indo-Pacific Strategy 2025: How can the US and its allies deter China from war, increase resilience and protect economic growth?”* was held at the Greentree Estate in suburban New York. Organized by the UK-based Ditchley Foundation, the event brought together over 30 participants, primarily from the United States, with several attendees from Europe and Asia. Over the course of three days, participants engaged in vigorous discussions aligned with the conference theme. Most attendees were experts in security, international politics, and economic security, and the discussions were conducted under the “Ditchley Rule,” akin to the Chatham House Rule.

Although the conference did not directly address energy issues, it is impossible to discuss the strategic competition between the U.S. and China in today’s world without touching upon energy security. Consequently, the discussions naturally encompassed broader energy security concerns, and international politics, geopolitics, and economic security were frequently analyzed through the lens of energy. As a researcher specializing in energy security, I sought to contribute to the overall discourse from that perspective. Below, I summarize the points that left the strongest impression on me during the three days of discussion.

First and foremost, I was struck by the extent to which China’s presence looms large in contemporary U.S. strategic thinking and how seriously the U.S. considers strategic responses to China as essential to safeguarding its national interests. The American participants represented a wide spectrum of political affiliations, professional backgrounds, and areas of expertise. Yet, a shared sense of urgency—almost akin to a crisis—was evident regarding how to prevail in the competition with China, or whether such a victory is even possible. Throughout all sessions, participants expressed a consistent awareness that the U.S. is being challenged by China across multiple domains: military and security, economic growth and employment, international politics and geopolitics, and economic and energy security. The prevailing sentiment was that the U.S. can no longer afford a posture of strategic patience or complacency. Rather, it must urgently and decisively formulate and implement counterstrategies.

Historically, the U.S. has faced serious challenges to its hegemonic status. The Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union was a global military standoff. In the 1980s, Japan’s rapid economic rise was perceived as a threat to U.S. economic dominance. Yet, in both cases, the U.S. ultimately prevailed, and its status as the sole superpower remained unshaken. However, the current “Strategic Competition” with China is unprecedented in terms of its breadth and depth, the strength of China’s competitive capabilities, and—most critically—the strategic intent behind China’s challenge. This is why, regardless of political party or administration, there appears to be a bipartisan consensus in the U.S. that China represents the most serious challenger to American global leadership. This acute sense of strategic urgency is now a driving force behind U.S. national strategy and policy.

Secondly, one of the key impressions I drew from the discussions in this conference is the growing

awareness within U.S. strategic thinking that, in order to prevail in the “Strategic Competition” with China, the United States must employ every available means and must not remain bound by conventional modes of thought. In response to China’s rapidly expanding military capabilities, the U.S. itself must pursue military enhancement more vigorously than ever before. The domains of competition have expanded significantly—into space, cyberspace, and potentially even the realm of artificial intelligence. Accordingly, it is imperative that the United States further elevate its advanced technological capabilities. To maintain its competitiveness in the global economy, the U.S. must fully leverage its “energy dominance” while simultaneously preserving and strengthening strategic industries and technologies. This necessitates the formulation and execution of robust industrial policies.

Within these discussions, there were arguments suggesting that, in order to sustain strategic industries and technologies, it may be necessary to depart from the principles of free trade and instead adopt protective and nurturing measures. While the tariffs introduced by President Trump have sparked diverse opinions within the U.S., when viewed through the lens of responding to Strategic Competition with China, such measures can be seen as part of a broader argument supporting strong intervention to preserve strategic capabilities. In the discussions I actively participated in—particularly those concerning rare earths and other critical minerals—there was a recurring theme: reliance on market principles alone will not resolve the issue of dependence on China. Instead, there is a strategic need to construct frameworks and systems that stimulate investment and sustain demand and markets.

Furthermore, the notion that “every means must be employed to win Strategic Competition” was accompanied by a strong recognition that, in addition to the United States’ own efforts, cooperation and coordination with allied nations are indispensable. As the theme of the conference suggests, collaboration within the “Indo-Pacific” region is of paramount importance in addressing this issue. While cooperation with Europe remains essential, strategic collaboration with allies in the Indo-Pacific—namely Japan, Australia, and South Korea—was repeatedly emphasized as the highest priority. The areas of cooperation are diverse, encompassing military and security, economic collaboration, the construction of strategic industrial supply chains, and energy security. It is necessary to appropriately combine bilateral cooperation (e.g., U.S.-Japan, U.S.-Australia, U.S.-South Korea) with multilateral frameworks (e.g., U.S.-Japan-Australia, U.S.-Japan-South Korea). Additionally, cooperation with India—a key player in the region—is indispensable when considering countermeasures against China. Strengthening connectivity with the Middle East, which links to the Indo-Pacific, and enhancing cooperation with Europe, a vital partner for the U.S. despite being outside the region, are undoubtedly essential elements for enduring the long-term Strategic Competition.

Thirdly, while the importance of allied cooperation was repeatedly emphasized, I sensed a growing concern among allies regarding the inward-looking trajectory of U.S. policy, particularly its “America First” orientation. This concern was shared even by American participants. Strengthening alliances is essential to addressing the “Strategic Competition” with China, yet there seems to exist a perception that current U.S. actions do not always align with this imperative. This has led to uncertainty about U.S. intentions and, in some cases, strains in alliance relationships. In dealings with key Global South players such as India, the U.S. has sometimes pursued strategies that complicate rather than strengthen cooperative ties. Overcoming these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the complex and difficult realities and a recalibration of U.S. strategy and engagement.

The intensifying and complex U.S.-China rivalry lies at the heart of global fragmentation and is the most critical factor shaping today’s international and geopolitical landscape. Participating in this high-level strategic discourse in the U.S. was an invaluable experience that deepened my understanding of

the challenges and imperatives surrounding this pivotal issue.

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