

GVPT 204: Uncertain Partners: The United States and China in a changing world

Fall 2023

M/W 1-1:50PM

JMZ 0220

Discussion sections on Fridays

Professor Scott Kastner

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Office hours: Mondays 2-3PM or by appointment

Teaching assistants:

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Introduction

The rapid ascent of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a major political and economic power has meant that its relationship with the United States has become central in contemporary international politics. To an increasing extent, some of the biggest global challenges—ranging from nuclear proliferation, to climate change, to economic growth—require U.S.-China cooperation if they are to be managed effectively.

Yet the U.S.-China relationship is at times turbulent, and its future remains highly uncertain. Economic relations, for instance, have become highly contentious. Meanwhile, U.S. arms sales and other interactions with Taiwan often provoke a strong reaction from the PRC. And some in Washington view China's rapid economic and military modernization with alarm—fearing that a stronger China will threaten U.S. allies and interests in the region. Over the past few years, the bilateral relationship has veered toward outright hostility.

Will the U.S. and China be able to find a way to set aside differences and cooperate in dealing with some of the vexing challenges facing the international community? Or are they more

likely to continue drifting toward a more adversarial relationship, as China's growing power—and the US reaction—generate a vicious cycle of mutual mistrust?

In this class, students will learn about the history of U.S.-China relations, and will be exposed to many of the current issues facing the relationship. Key topics and questions to be addressed include:

- The U.S.-China relationship has changed from highly adversarial during the early Cold War, to a close partnership in the latter Cold War, to an ambiguous post-Cold War relationship that is again becoming more adversarial. How can we account for these shifts?
- The issue of Taiwan remains central to the U.S.-China relationship. Beijing claims the island as a part of China, but the United States does not recognize Beijing's claims in this regard. Moreover, Washington has provided substantial support to Taiwan's defense capabilities—something China views as interference in the PRC's internal affairs. Why is Taiwan such a major issue in U.S.-China relations? Why is Taiwan so important for China, and why has the U.S. provided support for Taiwan? What are the prospects for conflict and peace in the Taiwan Strait?
- Over the past several decades, China has seen tremendous economic growth. Though living standards still lag behind the U.S., China is now the world's second largest economy and largest trading nation. Should we expect this growth to continue? What are the challenges facing China as it continues to develop economically?
- Why have economic relations between the two countries become so extensive, and what are the implications for political relations between Washington and Beijing? What is at stake in recent economic tension between the two countries?
- Recently, the US-China relationship has become much more tense. Can the two countries avoid a new Cold War?

Learning outcomes

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify major issues and questions pertaining to US-China relations.
- Identify key events in US-China relations and explain their significance.
- Understand and critically evaluate some of the arguments advanced by experts on US-China relations.
- Communicate effectively on US-China relations. Students should be able to make reasoned oral and written arguments relating to important issues in US-China relations.

Course requirements

The class will consist of 2 lectures each week taught by Prof. Kastner and a discussion section led each week by one of the assistants, Brian Wendelgass and Zhenze Huang. Students are expected to attend lectures, and to attend discussion sections having done the readings for the week.

Grades will be assigned using the plus/minus system, based on the following:

- Two in-class exams, on **October 2** and **November 6** (20% each)
- A final exam, on **December 14** (20%)
- Two short reaction papers, due **October 20** and **November 21** (15% each). Students will be asked to write roughly 2 pages for each paper, making an argument pertaining to one or more course readings. The specific prompts will be distributed approximately 10 days before the papers are due.
- Class participation (10%): based on participation in discussion sections. Attendance will be taken in discussion sections only. Discussion sections will focus primarily on course readings, but will also be an opportunity to discuss material covered in lectures.

Overall class grades will be rounded to the nearest point, and grades assigned based on the following scale:

97-100: A+

93-96: A

90-92: A-

87-89: B+

83-86: B

80-82: B-

77-79: C+

73-76: C

70-72: C-

67-69: D+

63-66: D

60-62: D-

59 and below: F

We will be understanding if a student is unable to attend a discussion section due to illness or for other reasons. Please be in touch with your TA if you cannot make a discussion section. We will not penalize the first 3 absences for any reason. If you need to miss more than three discussion sections, please let us know the reason, and we will accommodate in some way, such as by allowing for students to make up missed participation by meeting briefly with the TA via zoom, or by writing a short reaction to the week's readings. Students missing more than three sections, and who don't pursue make-up options, will see their overall class grade penalized by 1 percentage point for each additional section missed.

We will also be understanding if a student needs an extension on the paper assignment due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. Students requesting an extension must do so **PRIOR** to the due date (unless special circumstances make them unable to do so). Unexcused late papers will be penalized.

Likewise, if you need to miss an exam because of illness or some other reason, you should notify Prof. Kastner prior to the exam unless special circumstances make you unable to do so. We will work with you so that you can make up the exam. Please do not take in-class exams if you feel sick.

Please note that if Professor Kastner becomes ill, assuming he is well-enough to continue teaching, he will move all classes to zoom during the duration of his illness. The same goes for discussion sections if your TA becomes sick.

Students who feel ill should not come to class. If you need to miss an in-person class because you are ill or required to self-isolate, please be in touch with Professor Kastner or your TA and we will work with you to help you learn any material you miss.

Class policies and other important information

No recording:

Please note that we will be posting powerpoint slides on ELMS, but we will not be recording lectures or discussion sections. Students are not allowed to record or disseminate lectures or discussion sections. If you miss a lecture or discussion section, either your TA or Professor Kastner will be happy to set up a meeting to discuss material that you missed.

Cheating:

We take cheating very seriously, and will not hesitate to forward a case to the Office of Student Conduct if we suspect academic misconduct.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit: <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.

Statement on Diversity and Inclusivity:

The Government and Politics department deeply values the voices and perspectives of all people. We are committed to having a diverse department that recognizes and appreciates the differences in race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, abilities, class, nationality, and other factors. Our department prioritizes diversity and seeks to foster a diverse community reflected in its faculty, staff, and students.

In this class, students are invited to share their thoughts and a diversity of opinions is welcome. Respectful communication is expected, even when expressing differing perspectives. Supporting one's statement with research findings is encouraged. In accordance with free speech statutes, speech that contains threats of violence is prohibited.

Course readings

Course readings include the following two books:

- James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (USA: Vintage). 0679768610
- Shelley Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield). 1442204812

Several additional articles and book chapters are also assigned; these will be posted on the ELMS course reserves.

PLEASE NOTE: Materials covered in lecture will often be different from materials covered in readings, and some readings assigned in a particular week will not overlap closely with the topics covered in lecture. Thus, the lectures should not be seen as substituting for doing the reading, or vice-versa.

Topics and reading assignments

Part I: History

In this first part of the course, we will explore the history of US-China relations since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In particular, we will consider why relations between the two countries have changed dramatically over time.

Week 1 (August 28, 30): Introduction and Early Cold War

The first class, on August 28, will serve as an introduction. On August 30, we will begin a discussion of the early Cold War. Though the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the US did not establish formal diplomatic relations with the PRC government until the late 1970s. Why didn't the US recognize the PRC in 1949?

Week 1 Readings:

None

Week 2 (September 6): US-China relations during the early Cold War, continued.

This week we will continue our focus on the early Cold War. In late 1950, the United States and China found themselves fighting each other in a very costly war on the Korean Peninsula. Why did the two countries fight each other in Korea? Why did relations remain tense even after the conclusion of the war in 1953?

Week 2 Readings:

- Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao's Korean War Telegrams." *International Security* Vol 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992), 122-154.
- Mann, Prologue and chapter 1.

Week 3 (September 11, 13): Rapprochement and normalization: Why did Nixon go to China?

After two decades of adversarial relations, relations between the US and China began to warm in the early 1970s, culminating in a 1972 visit to China by US President Richard Nixon. In late 1978, the US and the PRC established full diplomatic relations. What caused this turnaround? Why did Nixon go to China?

Week 3 Readings:

- Mann, chapters 2-5

Week 4 (September 18, 20): US-China relations during the later Cold War; Tiananmen and its effect on US-China relations.

US-China relations were quite stable during the 1980s, but after 1989 relations between the two countries entered a more ambiguous phase. The end of the Cold War meant that a key reason for cooperation between the two countries was no longer salient. Meanwhile, the PRC crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989 shocked the US

public and led many in the US to hold a much more negative view of China. Why did the Tiananmen Square crackdown have such a lasting impact on the relationship?

Week 4 Readings:

- Mann, Chapters 7-11

Week 5 (September 25, 27): A complicated relationship: US-China relations after the Cold War.

Relations between the US and China during the 1990s and 2000s fluctuated quite dramatically, at times becoming quite tense, such as following the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999, and at other times exhibiting considerable cooperation. What were the key factors influencing US-China relations in the decades after the end of the Cold War?

Week 5 Readings:

- Mann, Chapters 12, 15, 16

IN-CLASS EXAM 1: Monday, October 2

Part II: China's Transformation and its Implications

Since 1978, China has undergone a dramatic economic transformation. The economy has grown rapidly, and the country has become deeply integrated into global markets. But political institutions remain authoritarian. In this part of the course, we will consider China's economy and political system, the challenges to continued reform, and implications for US-China relations.

Week 6 (October 2, 4): Reform and Opening: China's Economic Miracle.

The first in-class exam, covering Part 1 of the class, will take place on Monday. On Wednesday, we will shift into a discussion of China's economic transformation.

Beginning in 1978, China embarked on an economic reform program that resulted in a gradual transformation into a market economy. The economy averaged nearly 10 percent annual growth in the decades after 1978, and average living standards—though still lagging behind those seen in developed countries—have improved dramatically. This week we will explore China's dramatic economic transformation.

Week 6 Readings:

- Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford University Press, 2007). Chapter 2 (“China’s Economic Miracle”).

Week 7 (October 9, 11): China’s Political System; Economic and Political Challenges.

China’s economic transformation has not been accompanied by a political transformation. How does the political system work? What are the political and economic challenges facing China? What are the prospects for continued rapid economic development?

Week 7 Readings:

- Add Arne Westad, “What Does the West Really Know About Xi’s China?”, *Foreign Affairs* (online edition), June 13, 2023.
- “Could China Become Like Japan in the Early 1990s?” (Symposium of views), *The International Economy*, Winter 2023, pp. 22-39.

Part III: KEY ISSUES IN US-CHINA RELATIONS

Week 8 (October 16, 18): The Taiwan issue I: background

Taiwan has been a persistent issue in US-China relations. When the Chinese Communists established the PRC in 1949, the US continued to recognize instead the Nationalist government which by then had been forced to retreat to Taiwan. Since switching recognition in 1979, the US has continued to provide support for Taiwan, including arms sales; the PRC, meanwhile, views Taiwan as a province that must ultimately be reunified with the rest of China. Why has this been such an intractable issue, and what are the prospects for resolution?

Week 8 Readings:

- Rigger, Chapters 1, 2

Reaction Paper 1 due on Friday, October 20, 11:59PM

Week 9 (October 23, 25): The Taiwan issue II: recent developments

This week we will discuss the evolution of relations across the Taiwan Strait in recent years and the factors that have driven these changes.

Week 9 Readings:

- Rigger, Chapters 4, 6, and 8

Week 10 (October 30, November 1): The Taiwan issue III: continue with recent developments.

This week we will continue with our discussion of recent developments in cross-Taiwan Strait relations. We will also discuss the evolving US security relationship with Taiwan and how it affects US-China relations.

Week 10 Readings:

NONE.

In-Class Exam 2: Monday, November 6

Week 11 (November 6, 8): Finish Taiwan

Students will take the second in-class exam on Monday, November 6. On Wednesday, we will finish our discussion of the Taiwan issue by considering future prospects for conflict in the Taiwan Strait, and how such a conflict might involve the United States.

Week 11 Readings:

- Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass, "The Taiwan Long Game: Why the Best Solution is No Solution," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 102, no. 1 (January/February 2023), pp. 102-114.

Week 12 (November 13, 15): Regional Security Issues I: The North Korean nuclear issue and the East China Sea

This week and next we will examine regional security issues that have direct relevance for US-China relations. We will start this week with a discussion of the North Korean nuclear issue, focusing in particular on whether the US and China have competing interests on this issue. We will also discuss maritime disputes in the East China Sea.

Week 12 Readings:

- Sungmin Cho and Oriana Skylar Mastro, "North Korea is Becoming an Asset for China," *Foreign Affairs* (online), February 3, 2022.

Week 13 (November 20): Regional Security Issues II: The South China Sea

This week we will continue with our discussion of regional security issues, focusing on maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

Week 13 readings:
NONE

Reaction Paper 2 due Tuesday, November 21, 11:59PM

Note: no discussion sections this week (Thanksgiving).

Week 14 (November 27, 29): US-China economic relations

In 2018, the United States and China became enmeshed in a “trade war,” where the United States accused China of unfair trade practices and raised tariffs on Chinese goods; China retaliated by raising tariffs on US goods. This week and next week we will discuss the nature of the US-China economic relationship and some of the issues at the heart of US-China economic tensions.

Week 14 Readings:

- Dan Wang, “China’s Hidden Tech Revolution: How Beijing Threatens U.S. Dominance,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 102, no. 2 (March/April 2023), pp. 65-77.
- Elsa B. Kania and Adam Segal, “Globalized Innovation and Great Power Competition: the U.S.-China Tech Clash,” in Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein, eds., *After Engagement: Dilemmas in U.S.-China Security Relations* (Brookings, 2021), pp. 298-329.

Week 15 (December 4, 6): Finish economic relations; are the US and China heading toward a new Cold War?

In recent years the US-China relationship has become more adversarial. To what degree are the two countries heading toward a new Cold War? This week we will consider global competition between the two countries, the nature of the China-Russia relationship (particularly in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine) and how that affects the US-China relationship, and whether a new Cold War can be avoided.

Week 15 Readings:

- Jessica Chen Weiss, “The China Trap: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Perilous Logic of Zero-Sum Competition,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 101, no. 5 (September/October 2022), pp. 40-58.
- Patricia M. Kim, “The Limits of the No-Limits Partnership: China and Russia Can’t Be

Split, but They Can Be Thwarted,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 2 (March/April 2023), pp. 94-105.

- Elizabeth Economy, “Xi Jinping’s New World Order: Can China Remake the International System?,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 101, no. 1 (January/February 2022), pp. 52-67.

Week 16 (December 11): Conclusion

Week 16 readings:

None

Note: no discussion sections this week.

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, December 14, 1:30-3:30PM