

# Chinese Foreign Policy Brief

## Commentary since the re-election of Donald Trump

*Chinese officials have kept their comments on the incoming Trump Administration and its policies targeted and moderate, touting China's adherence to international rules and institutions. A circumscribed diversity of views exist among State-affiliated Chinese academics regarding the implications of Trump's return to the White House. But most do not expect a breakdown of bilateral relations, and prescribe continued engagement.*

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### INTRODUCTION

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This brief provides an overview of recent commentary from Chinese official and state-affiliated sources about China's foreign policy made since the reelection of Donald Trump. Identifying a set of themes from this publicly available material provides insight into how policy-makers in Beijing conceptualise international problems, and the range of prevailing opinions in their immediate circles. It shows us how the Chinese party-state wishes to be perceived and how it frames foreign policy problems for both international and domestic audiences.

# THEMES IN CHINESE OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS ON KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES FROM 7 NOVEMBER TO 3 DECEMBER

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## The rules-based international order

Chinese officials invariably make appeals to international law and institutions when commenting on issues and crises, regardless of whether China is directly concerned. These include trade relations, conflicts in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine War, and even territorial disputes in the South China Sea (where China maintains that the Permanent Court of Arbitration, ruling on China-Philippines dispute, had no jurisdiction).<sup>1</sup> In response to Trump and his associates' threats of tariffs and other trade restrictions, Beijing consistently criticises them as contravening WTO rules.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in the continued dispute with the US over the origin of COVID-19 and dispute with Japan over the latter's release of Fukushima nuclear powerplant's waste water, Beijing maintains that it has operated under the frameworks of the World Health Organisation and the International Atomic Energy Agency, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

## Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Beijing maintains that it takes no sides over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which it refers to as the 'Ukraine Crisis' (乌克兰危机). It consistently urges both sides to return to negotiation.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA), Regular Press Conference (hereafter MFA-PC) on 13 November 2024, [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241113\\_11525589.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241113_11525589.shtml); MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 18 November 2024*, [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241118\\_11528455.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241118_11528455.shtml); MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 11 November 2024*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241111\\_11524524.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241111_11524524.shtml); for Chinese position on South China Sea, see also MFA (2016) *Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 12 July 2016*, [www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531\\_11367334.html](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367334.html).

<sup>2</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 8 November 2024*, [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241108\\_11523548.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241108_11523548.shtml).

<sup>3</sup> Both in MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 3 December 2024*, [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202412/t20241203\\_11537523.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202412/t20241203_11537523.shtml).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA) has not speculated about what the second Trump Administration would or should do on the 'Ukraine Crisis', but Chinese pronouncements on this matter, often ignored by Western China-watchers, provide an indication of how China wishes to project itself.

Whatever tacit understanding there may be between Beijing and Moscow, Beijing has refrained from expressing support for Moscow. In his 12 December meeting with the Chairman of United Russia Party, Dmitri Medvedev, Xi Jinping reiterated China's principles of 'no expansion of the battlefield, no escalation of fighting and no provocation by any party'.<sup>4</sup> Beijing has not explicitly denounced the authorisation given by American, British, and French governments for Ukraine to use long-range missiles against Russia, only reiterating the call for both sides to exercise restraint.<sup>5</sup>

Beijing claims that it continues to strictly control the export of military and dual-use drones to either side of the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Beijing maintains that it has a 'strategic partnership' with Moscow and not an alliance, and says that 'non-alliance, non-confrontation, and non-targeting of third-parties' are the principles on which Sino-Russian 'bilateral cooperation' is based.<sup>7</sup>

## Taiwan

The Biden Administration's tacit approval for Taiwanese president Lai Ching-te's recent visit to American territories in the Pacific and a new round of US arms sales to Taiwan are condemned by Beijing as contravening the 'One China policy' and the three Sino-American joint communiques made since 1972.<sup>8</sup> China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA) has called for the US to respect those Sino-American mutual

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<sup>4</sup> MFA (2024), *Xi Jinping Meets with Chairman of the United Russia Party of Russia Dmitry Medvedev*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202412/t20241218\\_11496601.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202412/t20241218_11496601.html). For Chinese text, see [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/gjldrhd\\_674881/202412/t20241212\\_11543413.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/gjldrhd_674881/202412/t20241212_11543413.shtml).

<sup>5</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 18 November 2024*.

<sup>6</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 18 November 2024*.

<sup>7</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 8 November 2024*.

<sup>8</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 7 November 2024*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241107\\_11522924.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241107_11522924.shtml). For Taiwanese President's visit, see Reuters (2024) 'Taiwan's President Lai in US territory of Guam as part of Pacific tour', <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwans-president-lai-visits-pacific-ally-tuvalu-2024-12-04/>.

understandings.<sup>9</sup> With regard to US arms sales, the Ministry repeated its common refrain of taking forceful and resolute but unspecified countermeasures.<sup>10</sup>

The MFA uses the formulation that the ‘the Taiwan question is the first red line that cannot be crossed in China-US relations’.<sup>11</sup> This language does not specify either the particular actions of Washington which Beijing would consider a breach, or the actions Beijing would take in response.

Again, while the Trump team have hitherto said or done little on this front for Beijing to comment upon, this issue deserves constant monitoring given the implication of a miscalculation by either side, as well as the danger of assuming implacable bellicosity on Beijing’s part.

## Tech war

On 2 December, the Biden Administration announced another round of sanctions and semiconductor export restrictions against Chinese tech firms. China’s MFA (and the Department of Commerce) cast these measures as ‘overstretch[ing] the concept of national security’ (泛化国家安全概念, perhaps better translated as ‘over-securitisation’), ‘undermining international economic order’, and ‘disrupting the global supply chain’. However, the MFA did not announce the reciprocal export restrictions on materials; the announcement was made by the Department of Commerce later, on 3 December, and was not explicitly characterised as retaliatory.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 7 November 2024*; MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 15 November 2024*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202411/t20241115\\_11527073.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202411/t20241115_11527073.shtml).

<sup>10</sup> MFA (2024) *外交部发言人就美国批准向中国台湾地区出售3.85亿美元武器答记者问*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202412/t20241201\\_11535943.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202412/t20241201_11535943.shtml).

<sup>11</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 11 December 2024*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202412/t20241217\\_11495833.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202412/t20241217_11495833.html). For the Chinese text, see MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 11 December 2024*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/fyrbt\\_673021/jzhs1\\_673025/202412/t20241217\\_11495577.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/fyrbt_673021/jzhs1_673025/202412/t20241217_11495577.shtml).

<sup>12</sup> MFA (2024) *MFA-PC on 3 December 2024*, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/202412/t20241203\\_11537523.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202412/t20241203_11537523.shtml); Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, 3 December 2024, [https://www.mofcom.gov.cn/zwgk/zcfb/art/2024/art\\_3d5e990b43424e60828030f58a547b60.html](https://www.mofcom.gov.cn/zwgk/zcfb/art/2024/art_3d5e990b43424e60828030f58a547b60.html); for official Chinese translation of the term “泛国家安全化概念”, see MFA (2023) *Proposal of the People’s Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance*, [http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2023-09/19/content\\_116693021.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2023-09/19/content_116693021.htm).

## Other

In response to Trump's threat to retaliate against the sales of fentanyl into America by raising tariffs on Chinese imports beyond the already proposed 60%, the MFA's spokesperson said China had been, and would continue to be, willing to cooperate with the US on narcotics control, based on mutual respect and benefit. She added that the US side should appreciate both this goodwill and what the two countries had achieved.<sup>13</sup>

## COMMENTARY FROM SENIOR CHINESE ACADEMICS IN PARTY-STATE-AFFILIATED INSTITUTES

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When considering how the re-election of Trump is received within China, it is important to take into account the work of prominent academics and institutional researchers. An analysis of commentary from over 20 individual academics and one think tank, all of which have an affiliation with, or work for state-funded research institutes in addition to their university roles, shows a range of generally moderate views.

This section takes into account the commentary from the Center for China & Globalization (全球化智库, or CCG). While there is some dispute about the how closely this Beijing-based think tank is affiliated with the Party-State, its members include various former officials from the MFA and other Chinese state organs. The CCG does not publicly disclose its sources of funding, but it insists that it receives none from either the Communist Party of China or the Chinese government. On the other hand, it claims that its "proposals and recommendations are regularly heard by relevant state authorities, many of which have been acted on by the China's central leadership and have served as reference for major decisions made by relevant departments".<sup>14</sup>

Most of the commentary examined for this brief was made after the November election in the US, though a few highly relevant pieces came from earlier this year.

## Faith in the market

Chinese foreign policy experts seem to agree that decoupling is neither desirable nor very likely, at least not to any extreme extent. They believe that considerations of comparative advantage, inflation, and capital markets would constrain Trump's policy

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<sup>13</sup> MFA (2024) '外交部发言人就美方涉禁毒问题言论答记者问',

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt\\_673021/dhdw\\_673027/202411/t20241126\\_11533368.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/dhdw_673027/202411/t20241126_11533368.shtml)

<sup>14</sup> Center for China & Globalization (n.d.) *Overview*, <http://en.ccg.org.cn/overview>.

choices, and economic blowback against the US from a trade war would be severe.<sup>15</sup> They also agree that China has and continues to benefit from access to an open and competitive international market.

## The rules-based international order

There is a range of opinion on the rules-based international order. Everyone seems to agree that Trump will accelerate the disruption of the international order, though none seem to expect a cataclysmic collapse.<sup>16</sup> Some see upsides for China in this disruption, especially if America becomes more isolationist – however, very few specify what isolationism would mean in concrete policy terms.<sup>17</sup> Some expect Trump to pressure American allies to either take more responsibility for their own defence, or shoulder more fiscal burden for American security provisions, but there is little speculation on the implications for China’s relationships with these states. None seem to call for China to actively supplant American role or overturn the existing system.

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<sup>15</sup> 宋国友 (2024) ‘美国对华“三足”战略并不稳当’, originally published on Global Times, <http://fdi.fudan.edu.cn/ae/8f/c21257a700047/page.htm>; CHANNELWU (2024) ‘特朗普组建奇葩班底, 最重要的都和中国相关’, [finance.sina.com.cn/cj/2024-11-26/doc-incxiwew4432344.shtml](http://finance.sina.com.cn/cj/2024-11-26/doc-incxiwew4432344.shtml); 金灿荣 (2024) interview on 东方卫视 (Dragon Television) (2024), transcript published on NetEase [www.163.com/dy/article/JHOEM3DS051481US.html](http://www.163.com/dy/article/JHOEM3DS051481US.html); 杨希雨 (2024) ‘中美“脱钩”与“反脱钩”博弈, 事关全球贸易投资自由化秩序重构’, *海外看世界*, [www.blog.haiwaikanshijie.com/杨希雨-中美脱钩与反脱钩博弈, 事关全球贸易投资自由化秩序重构/](http://www.blog.haiwaikanshijie.com/杨希雨-中美脱钩与反脱钩博弈, 事关全球贸易投资自由化秩序重构/); 朱锋 (2024) ‘特朗普如何改变世界, 如何对待中国’, live stream interview, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=biRwlbWpt84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biRwlbWpt84).

<sup>16</sup> 宋国友 (2024) ‘美国对华“三足”战略并不稳当’, 31 October 2024; 刘阿明 and 陈东晓 (2024) roundtable discussion hosted by Shanghai Institutes [sic] for International Affairs, <http://iir.sass.org.cn/2024/1116/c443a574109/page.htm>; 樊吉社 (2024) *address at the 30<sup>th</sup> RUC-Shenzhen Social Sciences Salon*, 14 November 2024, summary provided by official WeChat account of Shenzhen Research Institute, Renmin University, [mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Yqchb5BlwQP0evoiHIXovQ](http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Yqchb5BlwQP0evoiHIXovQ); 上观新闻 (Shangguan News) (2024) ‘学者圆桌 | “特朗普现象”不是插曲, 美国下一步会“回到”哪里?’ [https://m.sohu.com/a/828203337\\_121332532/?pvid=000115\\_3w\\_a](https://m.sohu.com/a/828203337_121332532/?pvid=000115_3w_a); 金灿荣 (2024) interview on 东方卫视; 张文宗 (2024) ‘美国总统选举与外交政策走向’, *人民论坛|学术前沿*, <http://www.rmlt.com.cn/2024/1120/717446.shtml>; 达魏 (2024) interview by *China Talk*, [http://big5.china.com.cn/gate/big5/fangtan.china.com.cn/2024-11/25/content\\_117567355.htm](http://big5.china.com.cn/gate/big5/fangtan.china.com.cn/2024-11/25/content_117567355.htm); 杨希雨 (2024) ‘中美“脱钩”与“反脱钩”博弈, 事关全球贸易投资自由化秩序重构’; 凤凰大参考 (2024) ‘特朗普当选如何影响亚太? 前高官: 战略没变战术变, 但冲击不如 2018’, <https://i.ifeng.com/c/8erCTOvgWW3>.

<sup>17</sup> 张维为 (2024) interview by 东方卫视, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/JHOEM3DS051481US.html>; 上观新闻 (2024) ‘学者圆桌 | “特朗普现象”不是插曲, 美国下一步会“回到”哪里?’; for dissenting view on purported American isolationism, see 朱锋 (2024) live stream interview, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=biRwlbWpt84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biRwlbWpt84).

What China says about its foreign policy and the second Trump Administration

## Containment or bargaining?

There is uncertainty and disagreement as to whether Trump will pursue a policy of containment, or merely seek to renegotiate the Sino-American economic relations. Regardless, none of these experts dismiss the prospect of cooperation between the two countries, especially on the economic front.

China's America-watchers see Marco Rubio (Secretary of State nominee) and Robert Lighthizer (a proponent of aggressive trade restrictions who served as U.S. Trade Representative in the First Trump Administration) as the biggest threatening influences in the new Trump Administration, or at least representing a more hawkish influence on American policy – this is before the more recent news that the positions of Trade Representative and Secretary of Commerce have been given to other individuals. But Chinese academics agree that the new Trump Administration's policy is not yet certain – patient observation is needed.<sup>18</sup> Some argue that Trump's transactional approach could make him easier to deal with, but others believe that domestic political considerations within China and the US would severely limit the extent of 'deal-making' around sensitive issues such as Taiwan, since Trump's own advisor would likely dissuade him. Moreover, these experts imply, Beijing's insistence that Taiwan is a purely domestic question precludes treating it as part of an international bargain.<sup>19</sup>

## Whither America?

China's experts seem to agree that American domestic politics has major implications for China, and that these must be carefully understood. This is in contrast with structural realists in the West, such as John Mearsheimer, who tend to ignore the domestic situation when analysing international relations. Whereas some believe that Trump's emphatic comeback is a symptom of profound socio-political crises, others take the

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<sup>18</sup> 中国人民大学深圳研究院 (Shenzhen Research Institute, Renmin University) '观点速递 | 特朗普“二进白宫”，中美关系将如何演绎？', [mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Yqchb5BlwQP0evoiHIXovQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Yqchb5BlwQP0evoiHIXovQ); 朱锋, '特朗普如何改变世界，如何对待中国', live stream panel discussion; 王建伟 (2024) '特朗普会“重起炉灶”吗？', *海外看世界*, <https://blog.haiwaikanshijie.com/王建伟-特朗普会重起炉灶-吗？-海外看世界/>.

<sup>19</sup> For those who are optimistic about Trump's transactional approach, see 邵育群 (2024) '特朗普政府台海政策走向', *海外看世界*, <https://blog.haiwaikanshijie.com/邵育群-特朗普政府台海政策走向-海外看世界/>; Center for China & Globalization (2024) *How to Meet Trump Era's Challenges and Opportunities*, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/q4UuhAKqNdy0uDSYjwQftQ>; 潘维 (2024) '特朗普复辟与国际结构', *海外看世界*, <https://blog.haiwaikanshijie.com/潘维-特朗普复辟与国际结构-海外看世界/>; for the point about the political difficulty of making a deal around Taiwan, 王缉思, 胡然, and 赵建伟 (2024) '中国倾向于哈里斯还是特朗普？', *Foreign Affairs* (Chinese version), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/zh-hans/united-states/zhongguoqingxiangyuhalisihaitelangpu>.

more sanguine view that internal antagonism and populist backlashes are problems easily manageable for the American political system.<sup>20</sup> Most agree that the USA is on relative decline vis-à-vis China, but there is no speculation of a precipitous diminution of American power.<sup>21</sup>

## Self-improvement first

There is a consensus among Chinese observers that domestic economic development is still the priority for China. This is because, they argue, a solid domestic basis is necessary to weather any geopolitical storm.<sup>22</sup> Most express optimistic views on that front (as one might expect) but a former director of a Peking University-based research institute suggested that China's rapid rise could be a thing of the past; paradoxically, he believed, this would assuage some American fears about a rising rival.<sup>23</sup>

## Australia's role

The Center for China & Globalization report noted the return of the China correspondent of *The Australian* newspaper (Will Glasgow) to Beijing as an example of the normalisation of journalistic exchanges and improved mutual understanding. Chinese observers clearly pay attention to what countries like Australia do, on both official and unofficial levels.<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>20</sup> 上观新闻 (2024) ‘学者圆桌 | “特朗普现象”不是插曲，美国下一步会“回到”哪里？’，[https://m.sohu.com/a/828203337\\_121332532/?pvid=000115\\_3w\\_a](https://m.sohu.com/a/828203337_121332532/?pvid=000115_3w_a); 陈东晓 (2024) roundtable discussion hosted by Shanghai Institutes for International Affairs; 凤凰大参考 (2024) ‘特朗普当选如何影响亚太？前高官：战略没变战术变，但冲击不如 2018’。For the more sanguine views, see 观察者网 (2024) ‘特朗普为什么能赢’，<https://news.ifeng.com/c/8eJBScdys46>; 朱锋, 刁大明, and 于铁军 ‘特朗普如何改变世界，如何对待中国’ (2024), live stream interview.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, 张发林, Deputy Director of the Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, believes that at least in the short-run, the US dollar's hegemony will continue, see 中国人民大学深圳研究院 (Shenzhen Research Institute, Renmin University) (2024) ‘观点速递 | 特朗普“二进白宫”，中美关系将如何演绎？’.

<sup>22</sup> 朱锋, 刁大明, and 于铁军 (2024) ‘特朗普如何改变世界，如何对待中国’，livestream interview; 王缉思, ‘全球政治趋势与我国的国家安全’, *辽宁大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)*, 2024(5), <https://xb.lnu.edu.cn/info/14197/69384.htm>; 王缉思, 胡然, and 赵建伟, (2024) ‘中国倾向于哈里斯还是特朗普？’.

<sup>23</sup> 潘维 (2024) ‘特朗普复辟与国际结构’.

<sup>24</sup> Center for China & Globalization (2024) *How to Meet Trump Era's Challenges and Opportunities*.