



U.S. Fears About Growing Chinese Global Influence Explained With Expert Arnaud Bertrand

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): One of the foundations of US foreign policy in the Cold War, which was obviously aimed at undermining and stopping the Soviet Union, was to ensure that the Soviet Union and China never were permitted to align as well, or to unify. That there was always this huge wedge between the two countries that was critical to the US foreign policy makers in the Cold War, was you can't have Beijing and Moscow together in an alliance. Amazingly, the US managed to avoid that throughout the entire Cold War, and now it seems like China and Russia are closer to one another than they have been in a long, long time, including the fact that China is providing a lot of support for the Russian effort in Ukraine. How does the Chinese government see Russia in terms of being an ally? And why are they willing to stand behind Russia when it comes to Ukraine?

Arnaud Bertrand (AB): So I don't think that the Chinese are so much behind Russia on Ukraine. I mean, they've never provided weapons. I think to a very large extent this accusation in the US of providing dual use of goods and so on, is disinformation. I don't think that China does that a lot. Simply because, for China, there are many issues, like Taiwan. And for them Taiwan is a territorial integrity issue, where they consider Taiwan a province of China. They want the world to respect their territorial integrity, so they don't want to be cynical by backing Russia in Ukraine. Because that would mean that they respect territorial integrity for themselves, but not for Ukraine. In fact, if you look at the Chinese peace plan that was presented last year, it's a 12 point plan. So they presented it last year and it was almost immediately rejected, out of hand, by the West. The first point, and that was very much not reported in the media, or at least [only] very little, the first point of the plan is respecting the UN charter and Ukraine's territorial integrity. So, China is not behind Russia regarding Ukraine. But, in general, it's true that they're very, very close to Russia. First of all, because it's their biggest neighbour. So you always want to have a good relationship with your neighbour, of course. Especially if you study Chinese history, the threats always came from the north, right? So they were invaded by the Mongols so many times, by the Manchus,

and so on. So, having a good relationship with the northern neighbour is very important for the Chinese given their history. And also because they understand and that was written in Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard* as well, that he wrote – I can't remember the exact quote – that the most dangerous situation for the US, would be an alliance between China, Russia and Iran, because those are just very important and strategic countries. That's exactly what we have today, when you look at it. I mean, it's not an alliance in the military meaning of the term, but it's a strategic alliance. They're working together in order to bring about a multipolar world order, where the US cannot, anymore, basically submit countries to their will. And instead every country will have the opportunity to pursue their own interests more freely. That's the goal of the alliance, rather than fighting wars.

GG: Well, there's also a very related kind of paradox of American political discourse when it comes to China that I wanted to ask you about as well, which is, you know, we've been hearing at least since the Obama administration that we have to pivot to China, stop focusing so much on the Middle East, because China is our real long term adversary, we need to do what we can in the Pacific in order to undermine their aggression and all that, that sort of thing. And yet, at the same time that we constantly hear this belligerent rhetoric from Washington and the media about China, China is able to very extensively expand its influence into regions in the world that the United States has long dominated, including obviously in Africa and in South America and in the Middle East. Here in Brazil, for example, which the United States has always cared a lot about because it's the second largest country in the hemisphere, it has a lot of geostrategic importance and resources, China has now replaced the US as Brazil's biggest trading partner, and China has a lot of influence in Brazil as a result. And this is replicating itself all over the world, in African countries and in the Middle East. And so while we're claiming that we have to do everything to stop China, whatever we're doing is enabling, if not causing Chinese influence to grow. Why do you think China is having so much success in convincing or luring countries to kind of move away from the American and Western European sphere of influence and move to better relations with China?

AB: I think a lot of it has to do with the tangible benefits that they get from their relationship with China. So, first of all China has those five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which has been the core of their foreign policy. Well, ever since Zhou Enlai, on Mao, Zhou Enlai came up with those five principles. This year is the 70th anniversary of them, and they are pretty strict in respecting those principles. So one of them is non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Another one is peaceful co-existence. So no war. China has not fired a single bullet abroad since 1979. So that's what? That's 45 years. And pursuing mutual benefits is another of the principles. So when you deal with China, you get into a relationship where first of all a lot of trade happens. So the common view is that China sells an awful lot, but doesn't buy a lot from other countries, which is not true, I'm sure. When you look at Brazil, for instance, it also sells a lot to China. So it derives a lot of benefits from that. On top of being able to buy relatively cheap products from China. So all in all it's a very different approach to relationships than the US [has], whose economic power is declining. So, bit by bit, the relationship that many of the countries in the Global South get with the US is less and

less an economic relationship where they trade a lot, derive benefits from that, but it becomes more and more a purely political relationship, where the US makes a lot of demands, that are mostly in their own interests and the benefits for the countries involved, are less and less obvious. And it becomes a very one sided relationship that cannot be sustainable in the long term. I think that's the dynamic that we are progressively seeing.

GG: Yeah, there's that famous quote, from an African leader, I forget who, but he said, when the United States comes, you end up getting a lecture and when the Chinese come, you end up getting a new hospital. And I think this kind of resentment toward the US and to the West is something that China is very effectively exploiting. Let me ask you, you know, sometimes I honestly feel that Americans are more propagandised than almost any other country in the world. I mean, the fact that so many Americans believe that China is this aggressive, militaristic, expansionist power, while the US is sort of this peace loving country that just only tries to help other countries when, as you said, the Chinese haven't had a war since 1979, even that was like a one month border dispute with Vietnam and Cambodia. And I think it's fair to say the US has had quite a number of wars since 1979. But also you look at a map and you just see the US has China completely encircled with military bases in Japan and the Philippines and South Korea and off the coast of some of these islands and there's all kinds of US fighter jets buzzing China right near its border, it is something that, of course, the Chinese don't do to the United States. But I know from experience that when I try and convince people of this, when I try and make them see this kind of gap between the propaganda we hear about China on the one hand and the reality of their conduct on the other, the one thing people will raise is, Well, China clearly has its eyes on Taiwan and is threatening to invade Taiwan. There was reporting last week, I believe it was from the Financial Times that said that president Xi believes that the United States was trying to provoke China into invading Taiwan in order to kind of isolate the Chinese from the international stage, the way they did with Russia, and I guess a lot of people think that the US also helped provoke Russia into a war with Ukraine, and that China resisted that because they don't actually want a war over Taiwan. They obviously value it and think it's theirs as part of their territorial integrity, and they will insist on that. But what is the view in China, in Beijing with respect to Taiwan? Do you believe that there is some imminent willingness to use military force to take it back and control it? Or what is the Chinese plan with regard to Taiwan?

AB: No, I believe that everyone wants to avoid the war. I haven't met a single Chinese person who said they wanted to go to war over Taiwan. In fact, I think most Chinese, even on the mainland, prefer the status quo. The situation that has existed since the deal that Nixon and Kissinger made with China. And most Taiwanese want the status quo. You know, surveys after surveys, the Taiwanese say we want the situation we've had for decades, we don't want reunification. We don't want independence. Because it serves both countries so well. If you look at how the mainland and Taiwan developed over the past few decades, with the status quo, it makes total sense that both sides would want to continue like that. So I think that the reports, I mean, what Xi said, Xi Jinping said in the Financial Times, that's a very commonly held view in China. And I have no doubt that Xi Jinping himself truly believes that, that the US is playing the Taiwan card, as they say, and moving away from the agreements that they

made with with China in so many ways; the Nixon-Kissinger agreements, they are moving away from that, undermining the one-China principle in order to instigate a war and casus belli, in order to justify the same types of actions, that they took against Russia and try to isolate China from the international stage, that is the common view in China. When you look at US actions, with regards to Taiwan, it's actually pretty hard to deny that there are a lot of provocations going on. So, you know, look at the Pelosi visit to the island, recently they even put boots on the ground, there are American soldiers on the ground in Taiwan, just not anywhere in Taiwan, it is not on the Taiwan island itself, but it's on Kinmen island, which belongs to Republic of China, which is just a couple of miles off the coast of the mainland. So actions like that are immensely provoking, and, you know, why would they do that if they wanted to keep the status quo and keep the situation peaceful?

GG: And of course, Joe Biden, I mean, that's so interesting, because the status quo has worked since that agreement that Nixon and Kissinger struck. And yet you see very explicitly that Washington is trying to upend the status quo. Joe Biden is the first American president since that deal with Nixon, who has refused to maintain strategic ambiguity and has explicitly said on at least four occasions that if the Chinese try and take back Taiwan, we will go to war in order to protect Taiwan. And speaking of Nancy Pelosi, who made this very provocative visit to Taiwan as a separate country, she was in India today. I don't know if you saw this. And she gave a speech, where she was heaping praise on the Dalai Lama in Tibet, and she was saying, the Dalai Lama will be remembered as a great man through all of eternity. Whereas I'm saying to you, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, you will be remembered by nobody. Nobody will give you the slightest credit for anything. I mean, there's this very hawkish and militaristic and provocative posture by a lot of Democrats, not just Republicans. And I wanted to ask you about the role of superconductors [semiconductors] in that industry in Taiwan, because obviously, the importance of Taiwan is in a lot of ways based on their dominance of these chips and superconductors [semiconductors] on which the world's computers and internet depend. Do you think that the US sees Taiwan as worth fighting over because of that industry, or what do you make of the Taiwanese dominance over superconductors [semiconductors] and how that affects the American and Chinese views of semiconductors rather, and the way it affects Chinese and American relations?

AB: So first of all, I think from the Chinese saying, the semiconductor thing plays a very little role. I don't think it matters that much, simply because if you look, they've wanted to reunify with Taiwan since before semiconductors were a thing. So for them, from the Chinese standpoint, it's more putting an end to the Civil War, because that's really the root cause of the Taiwan issue. There was the Chinese Civil War between the communists and the KMT [Kuomintang], who were backed by the Americans, and at the end of the Civil War, which they lost, the KMT retreated on Taiwan, which was part of the Chinese territory and protected by the Americans, that was their last stand. And we are still in some way in this civil war, well, it's not the KMT in power anymore, but, you know, the Chinese in Taiwan are still making their last stand. And from the Chinese standpoint, it is putting an end to that civil war that motivates them. And also the fact that they are backed by the US, means that Taiwan is sort of the last remnant of China's so-called century of humiliation where foreign powers

came to China and colonised some parts of China and were able to dictate, you know, policy when it comes to China. Taiwan is the only place that remains that symbolises that. So in the Chinese mindset, those are the two key reasons, not semiconductors. From an American standpoint, I think semiconductors matter. What worries me quite a bit is the fact that they're forcing, TSMC, which is the big semiconductors company, to build some factories in the US, in Arizona, famously, in order to alleviate this danger, that, if there was a war in Taiwan, then semiconductor supply to the US would be affected. And why this worries me is, of course, because right now this is a very big deterrent for the US, not to have an immediate conflict in Taiwan because they know it will affect the semiconductor industry so much. But when that factory in Arizona is up and running, of course it will be much less of a deterrent. So it is quite worrying, I think. The more deterrence you remove, the more likely there is a war, unfortunately.

GG: So I just want to ask a couple of more questions because of time constraints. And I'd love to have you back on to ask you a lot more, including about things we haven't really got into, like the war in Gaza and the like. But, let me just ask you this, first of all: When people raised the issue of whether Washington is pursuing a Cold War with China or even the possibility of a shooting war with China, one of the things to me that seems different about China when it comes to United States is that in the past, whenever the United States wanted to go to war with a country, all different power centres in the United States were unified in their willingness to go to war; or at least they were indifferent toward it. Whereas in the United States, you have this really interesting split where financial elites and corporate America and Wall Street are very dependent on China, are in bed with the Chinese, have a very positive relationship with the Chinese economically, obviously for all kinds of reasons. And yet it's the military and intelligence communities that seem to be a lot more antagonistic to China. Do you see this split where so much of the American economy and American corporate power and Wall Street depend upon China as being an impediment, something that will impede a kind of all out Cold War of the kind we had with the Soviet Union that will endure for many decades?

AB: I think to some extent that we're seeing a lot of effort by the US, to salami slice, as the Chinese say, this close relationship. And, we're even seeing some US politicians, like, Robert O'Brien, who used to be Trump's national security advisor and, who, as I understand, is, one of Trump's closest advisers today when it comes to foreign policy. He just wrote an article in Foreign Affairs, where he called for a total decoupling of the Chinese on the US economy. And, I have no doubt that, if Trump gets elected in November, they will try to – I don't think they will manage to put in place a total decoupling, but at least they will decouple the economies in a very significant way compared with today. The Biden administration is also doing that to a quite an important extent today, especially when it comes to high tech, the tech industry. I often compare the current strategy of the US to the strategy of the aliens in the *Three Body Problem*, where the Santi, the aliens, send a device to Earth before they arrive to stop any technological progress on Earth, because otherwise they knew that, when they would finally arrive to Earth, then the humans would be more technologically advanced than they were, and in some way it is what the US is trying to do with China; trying to with the

sanctions on semiconductors, with the recent sanctions on green tech, and so on, they're trying to stop China's technological progress, in order to remain ahead in tech and remain dominant in the more value added products in the evolution, basically. To go back to your question, I think, today, both economies remain very coupled. But I think unfortunately, both parties, Republicans to a very, very strong extent and the Democrats to a slightly lesser extent, are trying very hard to stop this, well, to decouple to some extent, which is also worrying because, again, it is another deterrent against war. And when you try to remove that, war is again more likely.

GG: Yeah. It is amazing though, how, yet again on the major issues the two parties have so much overlap, even if they kind of have some differences on the margins, obviously, with regard to Ukraine, with regard to Israel, with regard to China. Let me ask you this last question just, briefly. I know you talk a lot about the Israeli war in Gaza that's backed by the United States. We cover it a lot, and are very critical of it in many different ways. But I wanted to ask you about this war from the Chinese perspective. Does the Chinese government care all that much about what the Israelis and Americans are doing in Gaza? And either way, do they see it as an opportunity to kind of feed into this narrative about the malign influence of the United States in the world that they're successfully employing to get more and more countries to want to be more closely aligned with them?

AB: So the answer is yes and yes. So first of all, the war in Gaza is quite extraordinary in China. I don't think I've ever seen a foreign conflict that was so publicised to the Chinese population in general. Like, very recently, we just had the Gaokao in China, which is the pre-university exam. It's an extremely important exam for Chinese young people. And we saw so many young kids at the end of their exam, getting out of the exam room with the Palestinian flag and that was going viral on Chinese social media. So people don't realise it's a very, very big topic in China. And of course, China has always been on the Palestinian side, ever since Mao. In fact, Mao several times compared the Palestine issue to the Taiwan issue. He thought they were extremely similar. So, yeah, it is very important for the Chinese people and for the Chinese government and they are definitely on the Palestinian side. After all, they don't want to eradicate Israel. They've always been pushing for a two state solution based on the 1967 borders. But in the current war in Gaza, they've done a lot to support Palestine in so many ways, diplomatically at the UN, and so on and so forth. And yes, they're absolutely using that to illustrate the US role in the world. In fact, it's fascinating, if you look at recent surveys in Southeast Asia, before the war, most countries, when asked the question, would you rather side with the US or China, most countries were replying to the US. But right now it's shifted after the war in Gaza. Especially in Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, where the answer to that question, would you rather side with the US or China, they replied China, 70 to 80%. I mean, it's quite extraordinary. So with their support of Gaza, I think the US is completely losing the Muslim world, which is, when you think of it, it is quite crazy that they are losing them now, after everything that happened, in the so-called War on Terror, but it's doing a lot of damage to the US image. And as a consequence, it's benefiting China, which looks like a much saner alternative to the US right now.

GG: It's amazing how much the US is willing to sacrifice and lose simply to tie itself at all times to Israel. I mean, I don't think people realise just how much damage is done to the United States' interests in the world. I super appreciate you for coming on. I hope people will follow your work, including where you're very prolific on Twitter. We'll put your profile there for people to follow it, and I hope they will. I really am an admirer of your work, and I appreciate your time tonight. And I hope to see you back on our show again.

AB: Thank you. It would be a great pleasure.

GG: All right, have a good evening.

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