# PRIMER: China — America's Greatest Adversary

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## BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

- The People's Republic of China (PRC), led by Xi Jinping's Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is the most significant external threat facing the United States and must be treated as an adversary, not merely as a competitor.
- The CCP's goal is for China to displace the United States as the world's foremost power and create a new international order controlled by Beijing.
- Though the United States retains some key military advantages, China has conducted a massive modernization campaign designed to rapidly increase its military capabilities, including assembling the world's numerically largest navy and expanding its nuclear weapons arsenal, with the goal defeating the United States in a conflict and taking Taiwan.
- While the United States should take reasonable steps to prevent a hot war with the PRC, including by maintaining an effective military deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the United States must recognize that it is already in a hostile conflict with China, which has been conducting political and economic warfare against the United States for decades.

## CHINA AS A MILITARY ADVERSARY

The PRC has been conducting a massive modernization campaign aimed at transforming its military into a one capable of defeating the United States and seizing Taiwan by force. China has already amassed the world's numerically largest navy, expected to reach 400 ships in the next few years. Should the PRC decide to invade Taiwan, China's supply of conventionally armed ballistic missiles would pose a significant threat to U.S. ships and bases in the region. Furthermore, the PRC is rapidly growing its nuclear arsenal and is estimated to have over 1,000 nuclear weapons by 2030. The PRC is also fielding unconventional equipment like drones and cyber capabilities, along with anti-satellite weapons that put American space infrastructure at risk. Beijing's military buildup is fueled by a defense budget that reportedly rivals that of the United States, bolstered by the CCP's complete control of China's commercial sector that blurs the distinction between military and civilian projects. Xi Jinping has made clear that he is preparing China for war and sees the United States as China's top adversary.

## CHINA AS AN ECONOMIC ADVERSARY

One of the America's greatest post-Cold War strategic blunders was allowing China into the World Trade Organization and attempting to integrate the PRC into the international economic order. Rather than this leading to democracy, China instead used this to more effectively cheat and steal to gain an economic advantage while maintaining its repressive totalitarian regime. The PRC strengthened its own economic resilience in key strategic sectors against pressure from the United States while simultaneously increasing U.S. dependence on China in those same areas. The PRC is now the world's second-largest economy and a global manufacturing powerhouse, which it achieved at America's expense. Notably, China controls over 90 percent of critical mineral processing as well as the lion's share of critical pharmaceutical ingredients, giving the PRC key chokeholds that can be used to harm the United States and American interests. Technologically, China is rapidly catching up to the United States in areas like artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technology, and biotechnology. These advancements have come in

large part due to the PRC's decades-long [espionage campaign](#) to steal American technology and data, an effort that includes an estimated $600 billion per year in [intellectual property theft](#) from the United States. Beijing's anti-competitive, state-driven economic policies have limited fair and reciprocal access for U.S. firms in the Chinese market, particularly in manufacturing, while China's extensive state subsidies to domestic industries have further distorted global competition and hindered U.S. competitiveness abroad.

## CHINA AS A U.S. HOMELAND SECURITY THREAT

China is not just a foreign policy problem — it is also a [homeland](#) security threat. The PRC has embedded itself in critical U.S. infrastructure through telecommunications systems, Chinese-made DJI drones used by law enforcement agencies, cranes used in 80 percent of U.S. ports, and components of the electrical grid like solar inverters, providing the CCP "[kill switches](#)" that it could activate. The PRC has also hijacked America's university system, as Chinese researchers at American universities have abused hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds to support technological development for China's military and repressive security apparatus. Additionally, through CCP-backed software like TikTok and DeepSeek, the PRC has launched a comprehensive information warfare [campaign](#) aimed at shaping an anti-American, pro-CCP information environment for over 170 million Americans. These efforts are [reinforced](#) by the PRC's elite cyber operations, which [harvest](#) vast quantities of Americans' personal data, steal intellectual property at scale, and embed access points within critical infrastructure.

## CHINA AS A CIVILIZATIONAL ADVERSARY

Driving China's clearly malicious actions against the United States is the CCP's belief that the United States as its primary obstacle to achieving — as Xi Jinping himself [proclaimed](#) — "a future where [China] will win the initiative and have the dominant position" in global affairs. CCP leaders consider the United States a key adversary who they must overcome to place China at the center of a world more hospitable to their brand of authoritarianism, in accordance with the CCP's fusion of traditional Chinese nationalism and communist dogma. China is already at the center of an anti-American bloc of hostile powers that includes Russia, Iran, and North Korea, with China and Russia infamously agreeing in 2022 to a "[no limits partnership](#)" between their respective nations, which they reaffirmed in 2025.

## POLICY APPROACH: RECOGNIZE CHINA IS AMERICA'S GREATEST ADVERSARY

China is America's foremost adversary and greatest threat. While the United States should take reasonable steps to mitigate armed conflict against the PRC, the United States must treat China as an adversary and serious threat to American security, freedom, and prosperity.

- **Retain Military Superiority:** China is building a military designed to defeat the United States in a conflict, and its defense industrial base is already on a wartime footing. The United States must retain [military superiority](#) to deter and, if necessary, win a conflict in the Indo-Pacific. This means moving the American defense industrial base to a wartime footing through modernizing the acquisition process, speedily producing systems and munitions at mass and scale, and developing cutting edge defense technology by maximizing public-private partnerships with the commercial sector. The United States also must invest at least 5 percent of GDP in its own defense and continue pushing allies to similarly increase defense spending, as well as ensure higher spending is directed towards procurement of weapons and systems necessary for a protracted great power conflict.

- **Execute a Global Strategy of Denial:** China is not merely a regional threat, but a global one that for decades has methodically carried out a plan to make China the dominant global power at the head of a new international order. The United States must prevent China from becoming the Indo-Pacific regional hegemon, where the Chinese threat is most acute, but it also must counter the larger global threat posed by the hostile China-led bloc, particularly Iran and Russia. This will require working in close partnership with key allies across the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East to strategically divide the security costs, ensuring U.S. assets can be focused on where they are must needed and maintaining critical support to front-line partners carrying their weight against the China-led bloc of adversaries.

- **Safeguard Our Homeland:** China has infiltrated the United States through business and academic partnerships, social media apps like TikTok, cyberwarfare, and technology used for critical infrastructure. The United States must identify and stop Chinese influence operations, stop using Chinese products in American critical infrastructure and energy facilities, and end academic and business partnerships that provide the PRC military access to critical technology and information. While the federal government is often seen as the main theater to thwart the PRC, states also have both a unique ability and mandate to pursue policies to protect the American people in partnership with the federal government and private sector.

- **Secure Critical Supply Chains:** The United States cannot depend on China for supply chains necessary for national security, economy, or healthcare. America must expand access to core components, including critical minerals, through increasing production and refining at home and prioritizing fair and reciprocal trade with trusted allies.

- **Protect Our Secrets:** The United States must stop the theft of American technology and data by China. This requires developing a "Crown Jewels Strategy" to identify a living, government-maintained list of priority technologies that receive national security-grade protection — most critically in the field of artificial intelligence. Additionally, legal frameworks need to be updated to account for China's gray-zone tactics, including modernizing the legal definition of economic espionage. The United States must also ensure that American academic institutions are safeguarding research and intellectual property to ensure they cannot become used by the Chinese military.

- **Maintain a Lead in the Technology Race:** The United States currently leads in critical and emerging technologies, holding a first-mover advantage that grants substantial leverage over global technological standards and applications. It is imperative that America safeguards this edge and denies the PRC opportunities to narrow the gap, especially in advanced semiconductor technologies that power next-generation artificial intelligence systems.