

Overcoming The Security Dilemma Between China and The United States: A New Security Paradigm of Holism

*Çin ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Arasındaki Güvenlik İkilemini Aşmak:
Bütüncül Bir Yeni Güvenlik Paradigması*

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Abstract

This article explores the increasing security dilemma between the United States (US) and China, rooted in the traditional Western security paradigm of individualism. Through a detailed analysis of US policy discourse and actions, the article highlights how this paradigm leads to an escalating tension. Contrastingly, the article presents China's holistic approach, demonstrated by its four global initiatives, Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative, as a solution to overcome these dilemmas. This alternative paradigm emphasizes cooperation, collective security, and multilateralism, suggesting a more effective path for global peace and security in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Security Dilemma, US-China Rivalry, Holistic Security, Global Initiatives, New Security Paradigm

Öz

Bu makale, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ve Çin arasındaki giderek artan güvenlik ikilemini, Batı'nın geleneksel bireyci güvenlik paradigması bağlamında incelemektedir. ABD'nin politika söylemi ve eylemleri ayrıntılı bir şekilde analiz edilerek bu paradigmanın gerginlikleri nasıl tırmandırdığı vurgulanmaktadır. Makale, buna karşılık Çin'in Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi, Küresel Kalkınma Girişimi, Küresel Güvenlik Girişimi ve Küresel Medeniyet Girişimi gibi dört küresel girişimiyle somutlaşan bütüncül yaklaşımını güvenlik ikilemlerini aşmak için bir çözüm olarak sunmaktadır. Bu alternatif paradigma, iş birliği, kolektif güvenlik ve çok taraflılığı vurgulayarak, küresel barış ve güvenlik için daha etkili bir yol önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güvenlik İkilemi, ABD-Çin Rekabeti, Bütüncül Güvenlik, Küresel Girişimler, Yeni Güvenlik Paradigması

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Introduction

The competition between China and the United States (US) is undoubtedly one of the most significant events in current international relations. The US regards China's development as one of its biggest security challenges and mobilizes various resources to suppress China. China has to face and respond to the enormous pressure brought by the US, and it seems inevitable that China and the US are falling into a new security dilemma, where the US views China's rise not merely as a challenge but as an existential threat. This dilemma is exacerbated by the traditional Western security paradigm, which relies heavily on individualistic principles and zero-sum logic. Such a framework fails to accommodate the complexities of a multipolar world, where interdependence and cooperative security models are increasingly relevant. Instead, U.S. policy has often resorted to confrontational strategies, resulting in a cycle of mistrust and escalating tensions that do not align with contemporary geopolitical realities.

The so-called new security dilemma between China and the US is actually a new manifestation of the ancient security dilemma in contemporary China-US relations. The security dilemma between countries has existed for a long time and is not uncommon, but its new manifestations in the new situation may bring greater destructive power. How to deeply analyze the underlying logic of the new security dilemma between China and the US and propose a reasonable solution is an unavoidable major issue in current international relations research.

This article attempts to conduct theoretical analysis on this issue and systematically discuss the transcendental logic of the Chinese solution. The second section shed lights on the current dynamics of the US-China rivalry by explaining the competition between two countries in an American policy discourse, how it refers China as a security threat in its official strategies, how it realizes the threat perception on paper into real life by taking practical measures and how the existing literature analyzes this dilemma. The third section will then start the theoretical discussion on the old security paradigm and how it connotes to western individualism and therefore creates a vicious circle of security dilemma. The following section will emphasize the missing aspects of this understanding especially for today's dynamics and why a potential shift from individualistic approach to holistic approach can bring more effective solutions to this vicious circle. Just before the concluding section of the article, the fifth section will demonstrate the Chinese President Xi Jinping's idea of community with a shared future for mankind together with the four global initiatives to overcome the current security dilemmas around the world with a more holistic approach. The article will provide an analysis by blending both the real-life political practices and theoretical backgrounds of these practices. Therefore, the existing literature and the official statements from Chinese and American authorities will be the main sources of this article.

The New Security Dilemma Between China and the United States

The Competition Between China and the United States in American Policy Discourse

Since the end of the Cold War, the dynamics of the global system have been shaped under the predominant role of the US, which is widely recognized by most experts as the singular pole of power. However, various changes that have emerged in the post-Cold

War era—such as economic crises, wars in the Middle East that affected the entire world, Africa's struggles for actual sovereignty, and the phenomenon of globalization—are significantly influencing the dynamics of today's global system and initiating a global transformation. This transformation can also be interpreted as the onset of a new era in world history. A key distinction of this new era is the transition of the global system from a unipolar to a multipolar configuration. During this transitional phase, the US, which has been viewed as a single pole until now, has attempted to constrain newly rising powers. These efforts are interpreted by many experts as attempts to maintain its power and sphere of influence in global politics. In this context, the US's efforts to limit rising powers, particularly the People's Republic of China, are explicitly indicated and observed in numerous policy decisions. Notably, the US perceives the People's Republic of China—celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2024—as an alternative threat to its global leadership and even to its existence. This perception is evident in both general foreign policy decisions and in those specifically aimed at China, wherein China is viewed as a security risk, as supported by various documents. They believe that China's strategy entails “deliberate and determined” efforts to “improve and harness the internal and external elements of national power” that will automatically place China in a “leading position in an enduring competition between systems” (US Department of Defense, 2022, p.3; US Department of Defense, 2023a).

When the US's political history is analyzed briefly, their tendency to define those who are not agreeing with their principle as a security threat is a common policy strategy as it also allows them to legitimate their suppressing and intervening policies around the world. In fact, during the Cold War, the biggest defined threat was the Soviets due to its growing power and potential to spread communism, seen directly in conflict with US-led liberalism. Starting from the Cold War, US also justified itself to intervene the Middle East to *protect* the Arabian Oil and to *protect* those countries from communism. Then the perceived enemy turned out to be located in Middle East for a long time for US officials. Especially throughout the Bush, Obama and partially Trump administrations, the focus was on Middle East. In fact, even during the Obama era, some started to criticize the administration's attitude towards China, claiming that it does not serve US interests (DeLisle & Goldstein, 2021). Yet, especially after the withdrawal decision from Middle East starting from 2020, the US started to shift its enemy perception perspective more into Asia-Pacific, mainly targeting Russia and China.

Chronologically, the framing of China as a significant security challenge can be traced through key policy documents and speeches. The 2000 National Security Strategy of the US, under President Bill Clinton, acknowledged the rise of China but primarily viewed it through the lens of engagement. However, as China's economic and military capabilities expanded, subsequent administrations began to recalibrate this perception. The 2006 National Security Strategy marked a turning point by categorizing China as a potential “*strategic competitor*.” This sentiment was amplified in the 2017 National Security Strategy, which explicitly articulated a shift in US policy, identifying China and Russia as “revisionist powers” that seeks to undermine US interests and global stability by using every means even including trade values, artificial intelligence and intellectual property (2017). In fact, there has even been some scholars defining such a tech war between China and US as the “defining event of the century” (Jain, 2021, p.73). Here, it might be

beneficial to briefly mention the academic perspectives about security dilemma regarding being a 'revisionist power'. Johnston argues that there are two ways to explain security dilemma; (1) the offensive insecurity spiral involving revisionist states and (2) defensive insecurity spiral involving status-quo states (2022). While the first one refers to the scenario that one or more states are actually not happy with the existing status-quo and institutions and therefore becomes offensive to change the dynamics, the second one refers mainly to those supporting the existing dynamics. So, when official documents from US are analyzed, China is claimed to be a revisionist state although they later shifted their way of referring China from the term revisionist to the one of hegemonistic that is challenging US and its institutions. In fact, in her interview the former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice clearly revealed the logic of the American policy makers by stating that "*if we don't shape the international environment, then others will . . . powers like China and Russia.*" (Kempe, 2024). The Russian Chinese partnership is also a specific concern for the US officials, in fact, Worldwide Threat Assessment report emphasized this by stating that they are more aligned together than any other time in history since 1950s (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2019). This Russian Chinese partnership still continues today under President Biden as their number one global priority is to "out-competing China and constraining Russia" (National Security Strategy, 2022, p.23). US's perception of growing US-China rivalry also states that Beijing sees this competition as "a part of an epochal geopolitical shift" (Office of the Director of the National Intelligence, 2022, p.6; Office of the Director of the National Intelligence, 2023).

Internally, China's remarkable economic growth since the late 20th century has transformed it into the world's second-largest economy today. The implementation of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s propelled China onto the global stage, allowing it to lift 800 million Chinese citizens out of poverty by developing its own economic model. By 2010, China surpassed Japan to become the second-largest economy, further fueling US concerns. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, illustrates China's ambitions to expand its economic influence through infrastructure investments across Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. This initiative not only reflects China's economic prowess but also raises alarms within the US about potential geopolitical ramifications, as countries become more willing to cooperate with China under the Chinese win-win cooperation models.

Externally, any military modernization has been seen as a direct threat by US, especially for its strategies in the Asia-Pacific region. Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall, who has been observing China's military improvements for over 15 years now, states that "China is not a future threat; China is a threat today," (US Department of Defense, 2024).

The South China Sea and Taiwan are both specifically focused regions of US policy makers in military sense. In fact, many scholars agree on the US-created origin of the concept of Indo-Pacific, which replaced the term Asia-Pacific in order to include the most potential ally of US in the region, i.e. India. The 2021 U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy explicitly identifies China's actions in the South China Sea as destabilizing and a threat to the rules-based international order.

The 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance further cements this notion, stating that "*China poses the most significant challenge to our national security.*" This escalatory rhetoric reflects a growing sense of urgency within American policy discourse, as the US perceives China's assertive foreign policy and its BRI as direct challenges to its influence. Additionally, the increasing sophistication of China's technological sector, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity has been perceived as issues for national security by US policy makers.

The US perception of China as a significant security competitor has deepened as China's influence and capabilities have expanded. This evolving dynamic highlights the shortcomings of the traditional security paradigm, prompting the need for a strategic reassessment that reflects the complexities of contemporary global interactions. A shift towards a more nuanced security approach, one that emphasizes cooperation and multilateral engagement, could help alleviate the risks associated with this growing rivalry. For US policymakers, the challenge lies in moving beyond the entrenched zero-sum mindset of the past and adopting a framework better suited to managing the intricacies of an increasingly multipolar world.

The Realistic Manifestation of the New Security Dilemma Between China and the United States

The evolving dynamics between the US and China have crystallized into a complex security dilemma that manifests through various strategic actions and counteractions. This section explores three significant dimensions of this dilemma: trade relations, alliance mechanisms, and military deployments. The methods used by US to constrain China as a security threat depended based on the different administrations of the US government. In fact, the Trump administration draws more of an economic and trade-oriented picture whereas the existing Biden administration pays more attention to military and political alliances. This section will present the real-life case studied under these three categories in order to see the realization of the security dilemma more clearly and also in order to demonstrate how the practical solutions provided by China, which will be explained in the last section before the conclusion, can contribute to the solution of the same issues.

US Trade Suppressions Against Against China and China's Counterattack

Many scholars agree that arming is not the only state action to build a security dilemma because modern threats also have a complex content (Liff & Ikenberry, 2014; Gerginova, 2022). The trade relationship between the US and China has increasingly become a battleground for competition despite the fact that they are each other's strongest trade partner, meaning that if one's economy fails, the other will be greatly affected as well. The data also underscores their deep economic interdependence, despite growing competition. In 2023, the total value of the US trade in goods with China recorded \$575 billion, \$148 billion US exports and \$427 billion imports (Statista, 2024). Additionally, China is the second largest holders of U.S. Treasury securities, holding approximately \$777 billion in 2024, signifying financial interdependence (TIC Data, 2024). However, this extensive economic entanglement also means that disruptions in one economy could have significant repercussions for the other. The implementation of tariffs on Chinese goods under the Trump administration, starting in 2018, marked a significant shift toward a more protectionist approach. For instance, the 2018-2019 US-China trade war led to a

sharp decline in bilateral trade and for some scholars these sanctions did not only fail to fulfill the objectives of US against China but also hurt the American businesses (Manak et.al., 2023). Similarly, in a scenario where China's economy slows down, US exporters could also experience a significant drop in demand, especially in agriculture and technology, where China is a major buyer. These statistics reveal that, despite their rivalry, the US and China are crucial to each other's economic stability. A failure in one economy would ripple through the other, further complicating their already tense relationship.

China's ongoing investments in technological innovation, particularly in sectors like semiconductor manufacturing and telecommunications, can be viewed as a countermeasure to US restrictions, aimed at enhancing self-reliance and reducing dependence on foreign technologies. Yet, the sanctions continue. Additionally, the US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns states that they have sanctioned over three hundred Chinese firms over several months hoping that China will change its policies and make it more align with theirs's (Kempe, 2024). Many scholars in the field also agree that US's reaction actually depends on whether the internal Chinese development is in line with US expectations (Jie, 2020). In fact, the Chief Financial Officer of the Chinese tech giant Huawei, who is also the daughter of the founder of Huawei, has been arrested in Canada upon the request of the US officials and has been sent to US for the court process. This Huawei case also draw a significant attention from scholars and the research showed that the states that rely on US's guarantees of security tend to be far more rejective of Huawei (Christie et. al., 2023). This specific case shows us the spreading nature of US protectionism and concerns regarding the chance to lose its global economic position. Similarly, the US's protectionism started to hurt not only Chinese economy but also the global trade. When the American factories sharply decreased their production due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 and when they could not fill the containers in the seaports to be sent back to China, China was accused of having over supply and dominating the global trade. On the other side of the story, China was still continuing mass production and had to have the containers back to Chinese ports to send them to globe and it was playing a significant role to maintain global trade during such a devastating pandemic. The economy and finance are still popular fields to constrain China among different US administrations but it's not only economy that they try to do so.

The United States's Alliance Mechanisms and It's Countermeasures

In response to the perceived threat from China, the US has actively sought to rebuild and strengthen its alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. Initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which includes the US, Japan, India, and Australia, serve to create a US led environment with local actors of Asia-Pacific. The AUKUS security pact between the US, the UK, and Australia, announced in 2021, further underscores this commitment to bolstering military capabilities in the region, including facilitating Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, a move that significantly escalates military capacity in the region and signals to China that the US intends to strengthen its military presence around Chinese waters. US's agreement with India to provide a much smaller alternative path to BRI can also be given as an example that showcases itself with economic calculations but underlies a political alliance behind stage.

This *mini-multilateralism* mechanism established by the US in the Asia-Pacific region, which targets China, includes not only the QUAD and AUKUS but also the trilateral cooperation among the US, Japan, and South Korea. These alliances arise from Washington's perception that China's rise, particularly its economic and military modernization, poses a challenge to US's regional influence and its broader global dominance. Although defined as a defensive measure by the US, such actions naturally provoke concern in Beijing, which views them as an effort to contain and encircle China.

Similarly, the increased trilateral cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, particularly in response to North Korea's missile tests, also reflects a broader strategic aim to limit China's regional influence. The US-Japan Security Alliance, which includes military bases in Japan, and joint US-South Korea military exercises are examples of how these trilateral frameworks are operationalized actively. The 2022 trilateral summit between the US, Japan, and South Korea resulted in the strengthening of missile defense systems and the sharing of real-time intelligence, which, while ostensibly aimed at countering North Korean threats, also contributes to the US's broader goal of projecting military power near China just by labeling the activity against North Korea on paper. China's defensive modernization, such as developing its navy and expanding regional trade ties, is frequently misinterpreted by Washington as aggressive, driving the US to deepen its alliances and further increasing tensions.

Beyond the Asia-Pacific, the US's security collaboration with India through the QUAD alliance, comprising the US, Japan, India, and Australia, also illustrates its strategy of mini-multilateralism. The 2021 QUAD summit marked a significant escalation in security cooperation, with commitments to increase joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean, enhance cyber security coordination, and develop supply chain resilience in technology sectors. These actions, often justified under the slogan of maintaining *a free and open Indo-Pacific*, are seen by Beijing as efforts to curtail China's BRI and its growing influence in global trade. The QUAD's military exercises, like the annual Malabar naval exercises, have increasingly become displays of joint military capability, further signaling to China that the US seeks to contain its influence through partnerships with regional actors. In fact, they even create a geopolitical term of Indo-Pacific rather than the pure geographical term of Asia-Pacific with the same objective.

The Philippines and Vietnam, two countries involved in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, provides yet other examples that US deepened the relations against China. In 2023, the US gained expanded access to four additional military bases in the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that is originally signed in 2014, enabling the US to station troops closer to Taiwan and the South China Sea, both of which are critical strategic regions to China (US Department of Defense, 2023b). Similarly, the US has bolstered its defense relations with Vietnam, especially after they have declared that they raised the relations into a strategic partnership level in 2023, with both sides agreeing to increase port visits by US naval ships and expand arms sales (US Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, 2024). These moves are widely interpreted in China as attempts to challenge its legitimate territorial claims in the South China Sea, intensifying the security dilemma.

The construction of these multilateral frameworks by the US exacerbates the security dilemma by framing China's regional activities as threatening. Beijing's actions, which are often aimed at securing economic stability and safeguarding its territorial integrity, are perceived in Washington as evidence of an expansionist agenda. This perception drives the US to fortify alliances and military partnerships throughout the region, which in turn provokes China to further enhance its defensive capabilities, including its naval modernization and the strengthening of its military bases in the South China Sea. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle of action and reaction, characteristic of a security dilemma, where both sides believe they are acting defensively, yet their actions are perceived as offensive by the other.

China has responded to these developments by reinforcing its diplomatic and economic ties with countries in the region. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which came into force in January 2022, illustrates China's strategy to strengthen its economic influence and cooperation with neighboring countries, thus presenting alternative models. Furthermore, China's participation in multilateral forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), emphasizes its commitment to regional stability and cooperation.

The Deployment of Military Forces by the United States in the Asia Pacific

The US has significantly increased its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region as part of its strategy to counterbalance China's growing influence. This includes regular naval operations in the South China Sea, joint military exercises with other and mostly local allies, and the establishment of new bases in strategic locations. In 2022, the US conducted a comprehensive military exercise in the Pacific, involving thousands of troops and advanced military assets, showcasing its readiness to address security challenges in the region, although only with military solutions. In fact, the increasing military cooperations between US and Japan and the offer to establish a NATO representative office in Japan can be seen as actual military steps taken to further demonstrate US's desire to have a military presence in the region. In fact, this is a commonly seen practice in US political history. As world recently seen the same strategy in Middle East, they see replacing military forces, whether directly US Army or through NATO, as a solution for ensuring their own power in the expense of turning the dynamics in the regions more complex to solve. For Middle East, for Asia-Pacific and even for Europe they follow similar practices. In fact, the Secretary of the Air Force Kendall also states that they are deepening the partnerships with their traditional allies in Europe and gives the example of the ratification of an agreement for integrating Norwegian Joint Strike Missile on F-35 Combat Jets, although there are clearly more peace-oriented ways to deepen alliance relations (US Department of Defense, 2024).

Obviously for any country that declares China as a clear enemy and the one that has military exercises around its borders, China also responds to these military deployments with a combination of assertive posturing and diplomatic outreach. The Chinese government emphasized its right to safeguard its own territorial integrity, particularly in the South China Sea, while also keeping the door for dialogues with neighboring countries to promote mutual understanding open. In fact, ASEAN can be seen as an effective platform for this aspect. The establishment of military installations on disputed islands in

the South China Sea is framed by China as a necessary measure to protect its sovereignty and maintain regional stability. Yet, this is the exact point where the whole situation looks more like a security dilemma. The security dilemma between the US and China can be characterized by a series of strategic moves and countermoves across trade relations and sanctions, political alliances, and military presence. Both nations continue to navigate this complex landscape, with actions taken in one sphere accelerating responses in another. The challenge lies in finding pathways for constructive engagement for peace that address mutual concerns while acknowledging the realities of the changing global order. As both countries evolve in their strategies, the potential for miscalculations underscores the importance of dialogue and diplomacy to mitigate tensions and foster a more stable international environment.

Academic Attention on the Security Dilemma Between China and the United States

The competition between the US and China, as two major powers of today, has naturally draws significant attention in academic discourse, particularly in the context of the security dilemma that arises from their strategic rivalry. Managing this security dilemma is also seen as the most pressing foreign policy challenge of the 21st century (Kertzer et. al., 2023; Tang, 2009). Scholars from all around the world have explored the origins, dynamics, and potential solutions for this dilemma, often trying to understand it with the help of theoretical frameworks within international relations and security studies literature. This chapter will try to understand and categorize the existing academic literature into several key approaches, highlighting the varied interpretations of this issue and reflecting on the centrality of the US-China relationship in shaping global security debates.

As drawing the attention more to the role of power, its transition and structural dynamics in terms of fueling the competition between the US and China, realist tradition turns out to be a crucial part of the literature. In fact, the most famous scholar of this perspective, John Mearsheimer argues that security dilemma is inevitable because the states are always concerned with their survivability and power accumulation (2001). In other words, rivalry will persist as long as the nations will continue seeking more power with relative gains and seeing each other's actions as threat to their own interests. To demonstrate his ideas to today; as China rises, it will seek to challenge US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region, and US will try to increase its power in the region, which overall leads to an intensification of the security competition. Chinese scholars, while acknowledging the structural tensions highlighted by realists, tend to emphasize the defensive nature of China's rise. They argue that China's strategy is focused on securing its regional interests and ensuring its development, rather than challenging the existing global order (Xuetong & Ryden, 2011). It is also important here to look for the recent history of China in terms of their historical experiences of insecurity and external threats, such as those during the Opium War and the century they call as the *humiliation* era, as motivations behind its defense-oriented policies. The Chinese realist school, therefore, frames the security dilemma not as a result of offensive ambition, but as a consequence of external misperceptions, particularly on the part of the US.

Liberal scholars have also contributed to the debate, focusing mostly on the role of economic interdependence and international institutions in resolving the security

dilemma. A significant part of the literature suggests that the deep economic ties between the US and China have created mutual dependencies which automatically reduces the likelihood of an actual conflict. American political economist Robert Keohane has long argued that economic interdependence, facilitated by international institutions, can act as a stabilizing element in great power rivalries. In this sense, mechanisms such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and bilateral trade agreements can mitigate tensions by creating more space for dialogue and cooperation, even amidst broader strategic competition. On the Chinese side, scholars have explored the potential for initiatives such as the BRI and the SCO to serve as platforms for multilateral cooperation, reducing the likelihood of conflict in line with the liberal scholars. Therefore, these initiatives may provide a framework for inclusive development and security cooperation for all, fostering a sense of shared interest. In fact, if one follows the recent Chinese diplomacy and policy in any field, s/he would also see the Chinese emphasis on win-win and non-zero-sum thinking principles in every action of the Chinese government.

Constructivist scholars offer a different perspective, focusing on the role of identity, perception, and strategic culture in shaping the security dilemma between the two powers. They argue that security dilemma is not just a product of material factors but is also shaped by how states perceive and interpret each other's actions and intentions. American constructivists like Alexander Wendt have argued that states act based on shared ideas and norms, and that the security dilemma is often a result of misperceptions or incompatible identities between different countries (1999). From this perspective, Chinese scholars such as Qin Yaqing have explored how China's strategic culture, rooted in historical experiences of humility and Confucian values, leads to a different approach to security compared to the US (2010). Qin argues that China's concept of peaceful development is shaped by its unique historical and philosophical traditions, which can be misunderstood by the West. In other words, a possible misreading of Chinese actions due to seeing them via "Western IR lenses" can escalate the rivalry and competition (DeLisle & Goldstein, 2021; Bunskoek & Shih, 2021, p.85). Therefore, the constructivist literature emphasizes the need for dialogue and mutual understanding to overcome the perceptual barriers that exacerbate the security dilemma.

A more recent strand of scholarship draws on critical theories and argues that both the US and China should be viewed not just as competitors in a zero-sum game, but as key actors in the reshaping of global governance. They suggest that the US has historically played a dominant role in constructing the global security architecture so far, based on Western norms of governance. This has contributed to tensions with China, which advocates for a more pluralistic and multipolar world order. In a parallel aspect, some Chinese scholars, argue that China's rise represents an opportunity to reform the global system in a way that better reflects the realities of a multipolar world. Another growing area of focus in the literature draws attention to the technological and geopolitical dimensions of the US-China rivalry. Scholars such as Graham Allison have warned of the dangers of a "Thucydides Trap" in which the rise of China leads to inevitable conflict with the established US order by pointing out to emerging technological domains—such as artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and space exploration—as potential arenas where the security dilemma may intensify even more (2017). This can also be because of a rising China and a relatively declining US (DeLisle & Goldstein, 2021). Ikenberry adds

three characteristics of US-China rivalry's uniqueness; (1) rise of China is a powerful rival creation, (2) China is a non-Western great power and (3) it means a transition from liberal hegemonic order to an illiberal leader (2024). This also emphasizes the structural differences deeply rooted in both the American and Chinese systems (Tiong & Li, 2023).

Individualism and the Old Security Paradigm Under the New Security Dilemma

The concept of the security dilemma has long been a crucial part of international relations, with historical examples illustrating the tragic dynamics that often result when states, seeking to ensure their own security, inadvertently create insecurity for others and ultimately creating wars. The security dilemma is rooted in the anarchic structure of the global system, where no central authority guarantees the security of states. This leads to a vicious cycle of mutual suspicion and military competition, even if no country has aggressive intentions.

The history showcased many examples of security dilemmas that was created due to the individualistic oriented security understanding. One of the most frequently cited historical examples of the security dilemma is the World War I. The rapid military build-up by European powers, combined with alliances and secret treaties, created an atmosphere of intense mutual suspicion. Germany's naval expansion was then seen as a direct threat. Although many European leaders did not desire war, their efforts to bolster their military capabilities created a spiral of fear and competition, which ultimately culminated in the outbreak of conflict in 1914, the costliest security dilemma of human history. Another significant example is the Cold War, particularly the nuclear arms race between the US and the Soviet Union. The development of nuclear weapons by both superpowers intensified their security competition, even though neither side sought direct military confrontation. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 exemplifies how close this security dilemma came to triggering a catastrophic conflict. This mutual escalation could lead to catastrophic consequences for the whole world. The Israeli-Arab conflict also provides a more regional example of the security dilemma. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Arab states have viewed Israel's security measures, particularly its military capability, as threatening, leading to reciprocal build-ups and periodic wars. The 1967 Six-Day War can be seen as an outcome of a security dilemma, where Israel's preemptive strike against neighboring countries was motivated by the perception of an imminent attack.

Whether in the context of rising great powers, ideological rivalries, or regional disputes, the tendency for states to view each other's defensive measures as aggressive intentions has often led to conflict. These cases also highlight the difficulty of breaking out of the security dilemma, as mutual suspicion and competitive dynamics can become deeply entrenched. Therefore, the security dilemma between the US and China can be seen as a new manifestation of an old problem, deeply rooted in the Western tradition of individualistic security concepts. Historically, the Western approach to international security has been shaped by a worldview that prioritizes individualism, both at the personal and state level. This tradition, grounded in classical liberal and realist thought, sees states as rational and most importantly as self-interested actors, much like individuals in a competitive, anarchic environment. In fact, Goldstein argues that structural

conditions of anarchy and distribution of power are among the top features to define the system's polarity (2020).

The philosophical underpinnings of this individualistic security paradigm can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who portrayed human nature and, indirectly, the state behavior as competitive. In Hobbes' Leviathan, individuals, motivated by fear and self-preservation, find themselves in a war of all against all. This idea of unending rivalry can be seen in the realist tradition of international relations today, where states ensure their own safety at the expense of others. This structural necessity for self-reliance and power seeking is a natural consequence of the individualistic perspective that permeates Western security thinking. In this sense, even the actions taken in the name of defense can be interpreted as threats by other states. This actually means that the Western understanding of security is a zero-sum game, where one state's gain inevitably translates into another's loss. The historical cases presented above also demonstrates how the logic of individualistic security leads states into traps of mutual suspicion and competition, even if neither party desires war.

In the contemporary US-China context, this individualistic understanding remains a powerful force. The US, driven by its motive to maintain liberal order and by its historical inclination toward unilateral security, views China's rise through the lens of competition. Defensive measures taken by China to secure its regional interests are perceived by the US as challenges to its own hegemony, leading to actions that worsening the security dilemma. The continuation of this pattern reflects the deep-seated cultural orientation toward individualism in Western strategic thinking. In essence, the security dilemma between the US and China is not a new phenomenon, but rather a contemporary iteration of a broader issue rooted in the Western understanding of security. The individualistic nature of Western political culture, which emphasizes the sovereignty and survival of the individual state in a competitive environment, naturally gives rise to such security dilemmas. As long as security is conceptualized in these narrow, zero-sum terms, the mutual mistrust and competition will continue to define global power dynamics, as has been the case in past historical rivalries. For a more peaceful world, it is clear that we need to change our lenses and start seeing differently.

Critique of Individualist Paradigm and the Holistic New Security Paradigm

As the world has experienced many unsolved security dilemmas, some of which caused actual wars that killed millions, the individualistic security paradigm with dominance in Western international relations theory, has faced increasing criticism. While this framework has historically shaped the policies of great powers, the limitations of viewing security as a zero-sum game have become more evident thanks to the changing dynamics of the globe. The underlying assumption that states must act as rational and self-interested actors in an anarchic system with focus on self-defense and power maximization has led to cyclical security dilemmas, arms races, and sustained instability. Despite efforts to ensure security through deterrence, balance of power, and alliances, these mechanisms have only managed to address immediate threats without fostering long-term global security.

The previous section emphasized the interconnectedness of US and China in terms of their economic relations. One can argue here that this interconnectedness also means if one fails, the other will also be hurt. Meaning, one's security should also be seen as other's security as well. Maybe it can be difficult to demonstrate this logic for US and China due to their extremely different images in world politics but let's take the scenario of Europe and US. Was not there any period in history that they see each other's security as their own? Was not it the reason for US to provide the Marshall Plan to Europe after the World War II, i.e. in order to secure the European market so that they can continue to be the American market's biggest customer? This shed light to the biggest critiques of the individualistic paradigm. Individualistic paradigm treats security in isolation, without recognizing the interconnectedness of states in the modern world. This approach neglects how defensive actions taken by one state can trigger insecurity elsewhere, perpetuating a cycle of fear and retaliation. It is now evident that the competitive self-centered nature of this framework creates environments where security for one often leads to insecurity for others. Such dynamics illustrate that individualism, while functional in maintaining temporary stability, does not provide a foundation for enduring peace. Additionally, the negative impacts of individualism have prompted deeper reflection within the intellectual community. Scholars and policymakers are increasingly aware that in an interconnected world, no single state can secure itself at the expense of all the others without causing harm to the broader system.

In response to these critiques, a shift toward a more holistic security paradigm has gained traction. The holistic approach to security fundamentally diverges from the individualistic model by focusing on the collective, integrated, and inclusive security. Rather than viewing security as the exclusive responsibility of individual states alone, this paradigm advocates for a more cooperative and system-oriented understanding, where the security of one state is inherently tied to the security of others.

The theoretical differences between individualism and holism are crucial and foundational. While individualism is rooted in the isolation and do-it-for-oneself of each actor, holism posits that the parts of a system cannot be understood in isolation from the whole as individuals are indivisible of the whole. Applied to security, this means that no state can be secure in an isolated sense. Security should be comprehensive, addressing economic, environmental, and societal dimensions alongside traditional concerns. Holism recognizes that security is multifaceted and that challenges, that include even the climate change, require collaborative efforts and shared solutions that serves to all. Three core characteristics can highlight the uniqueness of holistic approach to security. First, security cannot be guaranteed solely through military strength and only from separate state's concerns. It covers a wider range and requires addressing even to the economic inequality, access to resources, and political stability. For instance, post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan have highlighted that military success alone does not lead to stability; addressing economic and governance issues is equally important. Especially in today's world, where we started to talk about non-traditional security, a holistic perspective is needed both in terms of defining the security and also the actors of the security. The case that one state recognized a security challenge and solves it based on their view does not provide an actual solution to solve it. In fact, we can see quite recent examples of how security cannot arise or be solved by one state in insolation. The Syrian

War, although originated mainly from Syria alone, could spread to the whole region, even up until Europe. Although many thought in Syria that when the immigrants escaped from war mostly to Türkiye, the problem was solved in Syria. But then Türkiye became the country with the most migrants in the world, approximately more than 5 million, 3.5 million being Syrian (Mülteciler Derneği, 2024). The numbers are also claimed to be higher than that due to the potential groups with illegal border cross. The Syrians who want to move to Europe then start to cross the Greek borders illegally. They are sent back to Türkiye in a harsh way while creating another mini-security dilemma on the border between Greece and Türkiye because of a reason neither side is actually responsible. If one thinks that these examples are all concerning pure political objectives, then another example can be given from the recent global pandemic of COVID-19. No country could isolate itself, no could see it as only their problem, or no could find a solution only for themselves. If we apply the same logic to Asia-Pacific today, the fact that US has security concerns about the region does not automatically mean that there, for sure, is a security concern in the region. As characteristics of security dilemma, what one sees as defense can be seen as an offense by the other based on their point of view. That is exactly why we need a holistic approach to look all from the same point to security for all. Second, the stability, greatly influenced by the economic outlook of the globe, is foundational for global security. An interconnected global economy means that insecurity in one region can ripple outward, affecting the security of others. The 2008 global financial crisis, for example, demonstrated how economic instability in one part of the world can lead to widespread insecurity and crises, highlighted the need for a well-coordinated global response. Third, it highlights many fields and cooperative actions for it. It is not only about the military security that the world needs and we need to integrate various dimensions of security, i.e. military, economic, environmental, social etc. Climate change, for instance, has become a pressing security issue, as its impacts transcend borders and threaten the globe as a whole. The Paris Agreement on climate change reflects an acknowledgment that no single nation can mitigate the impacts of climate change alone, requiring comprehensive, collective action.

In today's global conjecture, the holistic security paradigm offers a way to address the root causes of insecurity rather than just thinking the self-interest first. There are even studies to take holistic approach for human rights defenders (Tactical Technology Collective, n.d.). Unlike the individualistic approach, which fosters competition and mistrust, the holistic approach accelerates cooperation and trust, creating a foundation for lasting peace with collective actions for all. As global challenges become more interconnected, the holistic security concept provides the only viable path to overcoming the persistent dilemmas and crises that have plagued international relations under the individualistic model. But how to realize it into real life and succeed a peace for all? China, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, has an answer. Because we see that China's national security has a holistic view, dedicated to coordinate and maintain state's external and internal security together with development (Yuchen, 2022).

New Security Paradigm and China's Solution

As we have started the article by first looking at the real-life demonstration of the old security paradigm by examining American policy discourse and how it reflects its principles in its real-life containment of China, it's now time to take the new security

paradigm under holism and to demonstrate how it can help achieve worldwide peace by overcoming security dilemmas and conflicts. As a country with first-hand experience of how the old security paradigm, imposed by other powers, can attempt to suppress its global success, China provides an effective case study. In fact, the four global initiatives introduced by Xi Jinping provide a concrete framework for practicing the new security paradigm based on holistic principles.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Comprehensive Connectivity

Launched in 2013 with his speeches in Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University and the Indonesian Parliament, the BRI is perhaps the most globally recognized of Xi Jinping's initiatives, focusing mostly on a comprehensive connectivity. In ancient Chinese culture, the importance of harmonious relationships and the pursuit of common prosperity were central tenets, often seen in the ancient Confucian thought. The BRI echoes this cultural wisdom today, thousands of years later, by seeking to build cooperative ties with other nations rather than fostering rivalry (Beyaz, 2024). It underscores the idea that mutual benefit and shared success contribute to a stable and peaceful world. It aims to create a network of infrastructure, trade routes, and economic and cultural cooperation that spans Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. Under the lens of holistic security, the BRI shifts away from the traditional focus on military dominance and instead, accelerates economic security through development and cooperation. By enhancing infrastructure and trade ties, the BRI increases interdependence of all, reducing the likelihood of conflict. For example, China's infrastructure investments in Africa and Central Asia not just only provide these regions with much-needed development with know-how or sources but also foster stability by increasing sustainable economic opportunities. This holistic view sees economic prosperity as a foundation for long-term peace, moving beyond the narrow, individualistic approach that prioritizes military power above everything.

The Global Development Initiative (GDI): Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity

The GDI, announced in 2021, further advances the holistic security paradigm by emphasizing the interconnectedness of development and security. It focuses on promoting sustainable development globally, with particular attention to reducing poverty, inequality, and the digital divide. It addresses the root causes of insecurity, including economic disparities and underdevelopment, which are often seen as the root causes for conflict. In fact, the holistic nature of the GDI is reminiscent of traditional Chinese thought, particularly from the Daoist concept of balance and harmony. By focusing on balance in global development, the GDI seeks to create a more equitable international environment, where nations can develop alongside one another, reducing competition and conflict. Through the GDI, China advocates for inclusive global development that ensures no country is left behind. In practical terms, this means encouraging collaboration between developed and developing countries, providing assistance in areas such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. In fact, the training programs of the Ministry of Commerce of China can be seen as an example of how to succeed this in real life. By addressing the structural causes of insecurity, i.e. economic exclusion and poverty, the GDI embodies a more comprehensive approach to achieving global security.

The Global Security Initiative (GSI): A New Vision for Collective Security

The GSI, launched in 2022, reflects a new vision for security that directly contrasts with the old individualistic paradigm that has been explained previously in this article. Just like the other initiatives, the GSI's principles also resonate with traditional Chinese strategic culture, particularly the emphasis on non-aggression and peaceful coexistence found in the ancient Art of War by Sun Tzu, where the highest form of strategy is to *win without fighting*. The GSI emphasizes a collective, cooperative approach to addressing global security challenges, advocating for dialogue, multilateralism, and shared responsibility as it takes a holistic approach. It challenges the realist notion that security is a zero-sum game and instead promotes the idea that security is indivisible, arguing that the security of one nation is interconnected with the security of others. All the GSI principles are covered previously in the holistic approach discussions but providing real life examples can make it clearer. In practice, the GSI encourages resolving conflicts through diplomacy and dialogue, supporting peace initiatives in regions like the Middle East and Africa. In fact, China could successfully mediate the crises between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and also could successfully make Russia and Ukraine sit on the same table after the Ukraine War break out. These two diplomatic attempts highlight the GSI's emphasis on promoting regional stability through dialogue rather than confrontation.

The Global Civilization Initiative (GCI): Promoting Mutual Respect and Cultural Exchange

The GCI, announced in 2023, broadens the understanding of holistic security by incorporating cultural and civilizational dimensions. Historically, China's approach to diplomacy has often included cultural engagement, as seen in the ancient Silk Road, where trade and cultural exchange went together. The GCI, in that sense, continues this tradition by promoting a world where civilizations learn from each other, reinforcing global peace and security through mutual respect. Therefore, the GCI seeks to promote mutual respect, understanding, and dialogue among different cultures, advocating for a world where diversity is seen as a cultural richness, not as a cause of fight. This initiative recognizes that many global conflicts originate not only from political or economic tensions but also from cultural misunderstandings and prejudices. In that sense, it is also closer to the constructivist perspective. By encouraging cultural exchanges, dialogues among civilizations, and respect for different development paths, the GCI works to build bridges of understanding that can prevent conflicts from arising. It aligns with the holistic security concept.

At the heart of all four initiatives is the foundational vision of Xi Jinping about building a community with a shared future for mankind. This holistic, interconnected worldview is also deeply embedded in Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism's emphasis on harmony and collective well-being. The idea of a shared future resonates with the Confucian ideal of *tianxia* (all under heaven), which encourages for governance based on mutual respect, fairness, and shared responsibility among all. This concept adopts the holistic security paradigm, promoting the idea that the fate of all nations, in fact all humanity, is interconnected and that global challenges, whether economic, environmental, or security-related, require cooperative solutions for all. It rejects the individualistic notion that any one nation can secure its future in isolation that is

independent than others. In fact, in the era of globalization, it is also getting more impossible. The idea of a shared future is not just a theoretical construct but is increasingly reflected in global cooperation on issues such as climate change, where the actions of one country can have profound impacts on the rest of the world. China's leadership in international climate negotiations and its efforts to promote green development through the BRI can demonstrate the practical application of this vision.

Conclusion

The US-China security dilemma, rooted in the traditional Western security paradigm, continues to dominate the strategic tension and rivalry between the two major Powers of today. This article has examined the competition between the US and China from several critical perspectives, identifying the limitations of the individualistic approach to security that underpins much of the US policy. This approach, based on zero-sum thinking and self-preservation, has exacerbated tensions, creating an environment of mistrust and escalation that is increasingly difficult to navigate. Framing of China as a revisionist power, and later as a hegemonic threat, reveals the deep-seated strategic insecurity that drives US foreign policy today. This has led to practical actions such as trade sanctions, alliance formations like the Quad and AUKUS, and increased military deployments in the Asia-Pacific region, all of which contribute to the intensification of the security dilemma even more.

The traditional security paradigm and the Western individualism founded on Hobbesian and Lockean principles fuels a cycle of competition and mistrust more. This individualistic paradigm views security as a zero-sum game, where the gains of one state mean losses for another. The US-China rivalry fits this pattern, with each side interpreting defensive measures of each other as aggressive, thereby intensifying the security dilemma. In contrast, the holistic security paradigm appears as an alternative framework. Holistic approach emphasizes cooperation, interdependence, and mutual security. It challenges the narrow focus on military and economic power, offering a more comprehensive view that includes social, environmental, and economic dimensions. In fact, China's four global initiatives—Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative are all in line with the holistic approach. These initiatives not only focus on development and security but also emphasize cultural exchange, multilateral cooperation, and collective growth. Through infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, conflict resolution, and cultural respect, China offers a new model for addressing the root causes of global insecurity. The emphasis regarding the impossibility of an isolated security for any country in the world is also highlighted greatly by Xi Jinping's concept of common destiny for all mankind.

In conclusion, while the US continues to operate within a framework that perpetuates rivalry and competition, China's holistic security paradigm provides a practical and forward-looking solution to the security dilemmas of the 21st century. By promoting interdependence, mutual respect, and cooperative security, China's initiatives offer a path to global peace that transcends the limitations of the traditional individualistic approach. As the world becomes more interconnected and interdependent, such a holistic model is not only desirable but necessary for overcoming the persistent challenges to international security in a sustainable way.

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