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Geoeconomics for the Sake of Geopolitics: U.S. Trade Policy Towards China Since 2017

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Abstract

Geoeconomics involves using economic power for geopolitical purposes, treating the “logic of conflict in the language of commerce” to achieve security or strategic objectives. It has become a dominant “war by other means” for the U.S. to achieve geopolitical goals since 2017. Therefore, this article aims to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China since President Trump’s first term from the perspective of geoeconomics. It reviews the resurgence of the geoeconomic narrative, analyzes how geoeconomic instruments manifest in U.S. trade policies towards China, and conceptualizes U.S. geoeconomic strategy through a three-layered concentric circle framework. It argues that weaponizing interdependence, dismantling multilateral trade mechanisms like the WTO, and doubling down on a “small yard, high fence: strategy will fragment global supply chains, erode economic efficiency, and destabilize the international economic order. Ultimately, this approach will boomerang on its initiator, severely compromising the economic well-being of the American public.

Keywords: Geoeconomics, Geopolitics, Trade Policy, Weaponized Interdependence, Tariff

1. Introduction

Since 2017, the United States’ trade policy towards China has structurally shifted from the eras of engagement and enlargement to pure geoeconomics, weaponizing tariffs, investment, export controls and technology vectors to achieve geopolitical goals. Rather than treating commerce and security as separate domains, from Trump first administration on, the U.S. has securitized trade policies subordinating economic and trade relations to zero-sum strategic imperatives to blunt China’s rise. Weaponizing geoeconomic tools is not new. The 1971 Nixon Shock was a seminal geoeconomic event where the U.S. unilaterally ended the dollar’s convertibility to gold, dismantling the Bretton Woods system to fix trade imbalances and prevent inflation. By imposing a 10% import surcharge and abandoning gold, Nixon used economic tools to force allies into currency revaluation to meet domestic policy needs of creating more and better jobs and stopping the rise in the cost of living. (Office of the Historian) The Plaza Accord of September 22, 1985, is another example, where the United States used its political and economic influence to orchestrate a coordinated devaluation of the U.S. dollar against the Japanese yen and German deutschmark aiming to correct massive trade imbalances on the U.S. side.(Frankel, 2015) The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the “New Washington Consensus” have marked the return of geoeconomics and the U.S. has entered a posture not of leading global economic and trade order, but of disrupting it in defense of its geopolitical goals. This article reviews the return of geoeconomic narratives, traces

how the U.S. has weaponized its trade policies towards China and employs a three-layered concentric circle diagram to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China.

2. The Return of Geoeconomics

As an emerging field, geoeconomics encompasses a significant number of contested visions, which result from the fact that the concept and research field are still under construction. (Bruna Coelho Jaeger and Pedro Vinicius Pereira Brites, 2025; Cathrin Mohr and Christoph Trebesch, 2025) Defining geoeconomics is not easy because the field is crowded with contending authorities from different research backgrounds like international relations, international economics and geographical economics. (Sparke, 2024) In the meanwhile, scholars from different theoretical standpoints also interpret it from different perspectives.

Realists in international relations view geoeconomics as a form of state-centric rivalry where states leverage economic power rather than military force to maximize security and influence, often through coercive measures. Liberals in international relations focus on the role of economic interdependence. While liberal tradition often emphasizes cooperation, geoeconomic realism highlights how this interdependence can be used as a tool for competition and coercion. Network theory emphasizes how the architecture of global economic networks allows central actors to use “chokepoint” effects to sanction or compel behavior. Critical geographers challenge the separation of geopolitics and geoeconomics, analyzing how knowledge-intensive capitalism and space affect the global economy. (Scholvin and Wigell, 2018; Moisiu, 2019; Csurgai, 2017; Sparke, 2024)

Notwithstanding the differences, the consensus about geoeconomics is that it is the use of economic instruments, such as trade policy, investment, sanctions, and technology transfers, by states to promote national interests, project power, and achieve geopolitical goals. It represents the intersection of economics and geopolitics, described as “the logic of war in the grammar of commerce” by Edward Luttwak in the name of Clausewitz. He assessed the United States’ position when Japan constituted its economic and trade threat at the global level. He also introduced the logic of military competition into the sphere of international trade and identified the advent of geoeconomics as a new perspective for understanding international disputes in the post-cold war era. (Luttwak, 1990, p19-20)

Attempting to build a persuasive case for why the United States should make much more vigorous use of its economic and financial muscle to advance its geopolitical interests, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Senior Fellows Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris argued in their book, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, “the American foreign policy establishment has long since forgotten that the U.S. was once an avid and successful practitioner of geoeconomics.” “Despite having the most powerful economy on earth, the United States too often reaches for the gun instead of the purse.” (2016, p225; p1) In the book, they examined thoroughly the geoeconomic instruments available to states, including trade policy, investment policy, economic sanctions, cyber, foreign aid, monetary policy, and energy and commodity policies. They also discussed the interrelations among them—noting where synergies can be found and where tensions may lie. They contended that the United States must strategically integrate economic and financial instruments into its foreign policy or risk losing ground as a world power.

Actually, *War by Other Means* is just one example of a “larger geoeconomic narrative” being created among the prevailing neoliberal economic views of market integration and free trade despite the fact that the U.S. is still collecting dividends. For example, in *No Trade Is Free*, Robert Lighthizer demonstrates how contemporary trade structures, exemplified by the World Trade Organization (WTO), have actively hampered the ability of the United States to create economic strategies that are in sync with its own economic interests. (2023) The return to geoeconomic narratives also include the reviving of mercantilist tradition and the Trump corollary to Monroe Doctrine.

3. Geoeconomics for the Sake of Geopolitics

Obviously, for the U.S., geoeconomics is the continuation of geopolitics by other means and China is the main target of its geoeconomic strategies. US trade policy towards China has evolved into a “geoeconomic” strategy—

using economic tools to achieve national security goals—characterized by tariffs, export controls, and investment restrictions. This shift involves initially decoupling, then de-risking, targeting sectors like AI, semiconductors, and green technology. The geoeconomic means are represented by the protective, securitization of trade as well as unilateral and transaction-based China trade policies of the Trump first and second administration also Biden administration in between, which could be listed as follows:

1) Since 2016, Washington has disengaged from the WTO's appellate body, the organization's dispute settlement mechanism, and blocked the appointment of new members since 2019. Currently, the Appellate Body is unable to review appeals given its ongoing vacancies. The term of the last sitting Appellate Body member expired on 30 November 2020. The U.S. continues to use its veto power to block the appointment of new judges. As of October 2025, the U.S. had blocked the selection process for the 91st time. (Reuters, 2025) In early 2025, the Trump administration suspended U.S. financial contributions to the WTO, citing dissatisfaction with the pace of reform and the perceived "anti-American bias" of the organization (Le Poidevin, 2026). Therefore, it explains that the trade policies the Trump administration and Biden administration were/are pursuing constitutes a violation to fundamental commitments in the WTO Agreement, as well as its spirit. The US committed to honor thousands of binding tariffs, negotiated with the rest of the WTO membership, as part of its acceptance of the WTO Agreement. The US is disregarding these obligations by violating the core prohibition to unilaterally increase duties that have been capped (Art. II GATT). Also, the U.S. violated/is violating the Most-Favored Nation (MFN) non-discrimination clause (Art. I GATT) by not being applied to all WTO members. (Horn and Mavroidis, 2025)

2) US President Donald Trump's first term initiated to retreat from multilateral free trade and use trade policies as geoeconomic weapons to reset the trade balance of the US with the rest of the world and especially China. Employing Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the Trump administration began by imposing tariffs of 25 percent on products covering roughly \$34 billion of US imports from China in July 2018 (List 1) and on \$16 billion of imports in August (List 2). The trade war continued with Trump imposing 10 percent tariffs on an additional \$200 billion of imports in September 2018 (List 3), increasing the rate of those duties to 25 percent in June 2019. In September 2019, Trump hit another \$102 billion of imports (List 4A) with 15 percent tariffs, subsequently reducing them to 7.5 percent upon implementation of the US-China Phase One agreement in February 2020. (Bown, 2020)

These tariffs are obviously inconsistent with GATT Article I (most-favored nation); Article II (tariff bindings); Article XI (when turned into quotas); and Article XIX and the WTO Safeguards Agreement. A WTO Panel ruled that the section 301 tariffs levied on imports from China violated GATT Articles I and II." Article 16.4 of the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) provides that the report of a WTO dispute settlement panel may not be considered by the DSB "until after completion of the appeal." The U.S. appealed the adverse ruling in the China Tariffs case, effectively blocking any DSB action. Because the Appellate Body has not been allowed to function since December 2019, because of the U.S. boycott, the appeal in the China Tariffs case cannot be heard. Thus, the ruling in this case is non-binding. (Schoenbaum, 2023, p108-109)

3) The expansion of the use of Sections 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 and 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 as well as the extensive use of IEEPA (emergency national security threats) authorities; They have thus become geoeconomic weapons.

During the Trump first administration, the USTR made unprecedented use of the legal authority in the United States known as section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. From 2001 to 2017, only four section 301 investigations were undertaken, all in full compliance with WTO norms. President Trump's USTR, however violated WTO rules, launched six section 301 investigations (including against China)

While previous presidents invoked Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 rarely and selectively, the first Trump administration set an important precedent by invoking Section 232 to impose 25 percent tariffs on steel and 10 percent on aluminum imports.

4) During the first Trump administration, U.S. export controls on China underwent a significant transformation, shifting from a focus on traditional, military-specific items to a broader, "whole-of-government" approach aimed at curbing China's technological advancement in key areas like artificial intelligence and semiconductors. (Sutter, 2025)

This period marked a transition towards using export controls as a geoeconomic tool in a broader technology war rather than just for security compliance. (Barkin 2020) Trump called it "decoupling." But PIIE economist

Chad Bown believed that “Trump has it wrong. His decoupling policy here could mean losses of billions of dollars of American sales not only to China but to other countries as well. And the unilateral nature of his policy could open new areas of conflict with the very same allies that are essential to mitigating the national security threat.” (Bown, 2020)

In 2019, the Department of Commerce added Huawei and its affiliates to the Entity List, banning U.S. firms from selling components or software to the company.

The administration broke the tradition of the modern use of the FDPR in 2020 to target Huawei globally. The Foreign Direct Product Rule (FDPR) is a U.S. export control regulation that extends American legal jurisdiction to foreign-made items produced outside the U.S. This rule weaponized FDPR and imposed long armed control on items made entirely outside the U.S. if they were produced using certain U.S. technology or software.

The administration added SMIC (Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation) to the Entity List in 2020 to restrict its access to U.S. semiconductor manufacturing equipment.

The Export Control Reform Act of 2018 (ECRA) was signed into law, providing the executive branch with expanded permanent authority to control “emerging and foundational technologies” critical to national security. (Gertz and Krueger, 2025;)

- 5) Biden had ignored the pleas of industry groups to end the China tariffs. President Joe Biden had not only left Trump’s China tariffs mostly in place, but also more targeted and focused on blunting China’s development in high-technology sectors, even if the first Trump administration’s export controls on semiconductors and equipment hurt the US technology sector and its relations with allies. The Biden administration combined the CHIPS and Science Act, passed in August 2022, with stringent export controls on China. In the meanwhile, the CHIPS act subsidizes U.S. domestic semiconductor manufacturing and encourages allies’ investment in these sectors.

On October 7, 2022, the U.S. Commerce Department’s Bureau of Industry Security (BIS) released new export control regulations that intensify and complicate U.S. and non-U.S. companies’ international trade control challenges with respect to China. The New Regulations, among other things, imposed restrictions on advanced computing integrated circuits (ICs), computer commodities that contain such ICs and certain semiconductor manufacturing items, and expanded controls on transactions involving items for supercomputer and semiconductor manufacturing end uses.

On October 17, 2023, the U.S. Commerce Department’s Bureau of Industry Security (BIS) issued revised export control regulations intended to impede China’s efforts to obtain and produce advanced semiconductors. On May 14, 2024, President Biden directed U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai to impose a set of staged tariff increases on about \$18 billion worth of imports from China in an array of strategic sectors: steel and aluminum, semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), batteries, critical minerals, solar cells, ship-to-shore cranes, and medical products. (USTR trade release)

- 6) In his second term, President Trump declared a national emergency and repeatedly imposed tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) at levels not seen since the 1930s. It was invoked as a geoeconomic statecraft to manage trade relationship, revitalize U.S. manufacturing and generate revenue. Within hours of the Supreme Court’s decision to remove IEEPA as an open-ended authority for adjusting tariffs, the president announced a two-stage plan to maintain the tariff regime under different statutory authorities: invoking Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose temporary tariffs of up to 15% for 150 days, while launching a series of investigations under Section 301 of the same statute that could support more sustained tariff actions. The 301 investigations launched against 16 countries including China, the European Union, Japan, Mexico, India, Switzerland, Norway, and others.

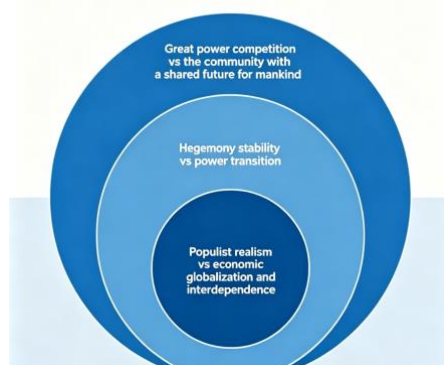
Moreover, the second Trump administration has intensified and expanded export controls on China, transforming them into a flexible, often revenue-generating tool and economic negotiation weapon rather than just a narrow national security measure. (Gertz and Krueger, 2025)

The administration has targeted semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and related manufacturing equipment, following on from, and expanding upon Biden-era rules.

The U.S. dramatically expanded the number of firms subject to export controls, targeting subsidiaries and affiliates of already blacklisted companies to close loopholes.

4. A Geoeconomic Interpretation

Evidently, the Trump and Biden administrations are the classic geoeconomic cases of how to weaponize trade to achieve geopolitical ends. On the basis of the above review and analysis, this research builds up an analytical framework from the interdisciplinary perspectives of geostrategy, geo-economic power theory, power transition theory and hegemonic stability theory to interpret American geostrategic strategies against China and its impact on global economy order.



Inspired by the ecological system approach developed by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner to explain human development through nested environmental layers, this research uses a three-layered concentric circle diagram to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China from the perspective of geoeconomics. (Özdoğan, A., 2011) From the mesosystem, to exosystem and macrosystem, this diagram analyzes how nested trade and economic environmental layers interact and influence each other.

The diagram maps how the U.S. has reframed its trade policy towards China over the past decade and how it is actually counterproductive against the backgrounds of reversing the fruits of more than three decades of economic globalization, the rise of China and also the middle powers, as well as China's alternative means to frame greater power competition, the community with a shared future for mankind.

4.1. *Populist realism vs economic globalization and interdependence*

Populist realism, often described as a blend of “America First” nationalism and transactional pragmatism, became a defining framework of the Trump presidency and has re-emerged as a core component of his subsequent policy moves. It represents a shift from traditional ideological, value-based foreign policy toward a focus on immediate national interests and domestic political signaling.

President Trump's China trade policy narratives are crafted for American domestic consumption, particularly his political base. Narratives like “America First,” “The Chinese will eat your dinner,” and characterizations of China as “economic predator” resonated with MAGA voters who felt that previous administrations had prioritized international relationships over American interests. The rhetoric also “tapped into an “us vs. them” populist narrative that blamed global elites and foreign competitors for the hardships faced by American workers. “The language was stark, with China portrayed not as a trade partner but as a threat to American sovereignty.” (Skonieczny and Sherel, 2024; Homolar and Ruiz, 2025)

During Biden presidency, Trump first term trade war with China not only persisted but upgraded and more targeted. His National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and USTR Katherine Tai framed US-China relations in terms of protecting American industries and workers from China's expansionist ambitions. (USTR news release, 2022) In her article published in *International Affairs*, Amy Skonieczny of San Francisco State University “identified a narrative coherence between Trump's nationalist-populist discourse and the trade rhetoric of the Biden administration, revealing a legacy of narrative expectation that constrains policy choices.” (2024)

Therefore, since 2017, American trade policies towards China have prioritized American manufacturing and jobs through aggressive, unilateral actions, such as tariffs and strict export controls rather than relying on multilateral organizations like the WTO.

When bilateral trade relationship is framed in a populist lens, securitization of trade has become the most likely policy choice. Thus, international trade is framed not as a mutually beneficial win-win situation, but as a zero-sum game where China has exploited globalist elites to the detriment of American workers. By 2026, U.S. trade policy towards China has matured into a bipartisan position, shifting toward protectionism and economic decoupling or derisking which marks the end of the liberal, free-trade era.

However, the global economy has irreversibly entered the stage of interdependence and integration. Weaponizing trade policies and adopting “America First” trade agenda represents a fundamental shift from traditional multilateralism toward a system of unilateral action and reciprocity-based bilateralism. The trade agenda aims to reduce trade deficits and bolster national security, but it has profoundly reshaped global economic interdependence by introducing new costs and uncertainties into global supply chains.

The policy has triggered global supply chain fragmentation. And it does not meet domestic policy goals either. The U.S. trade deficit for goods hit a record in 2025 and reached \$901.5 billion despite Trump’s claim his signature tariffs would reduce it. As for Trump’s reindustrialization goals, the U.S. manufacturing sector has lost around 72,000 jobs since Trump announced his so-called Liberation Day tariffs last April. (CFR Daily News Brief, 2026; BEA news release, 2026)

The trade deficit with China was overtaken by the deficit with the European Union for the first time on record in 2025. U.S. deficits with Vietnam and Mexico reached all-time highs as firms rerouted supply chains to bypass U.S. tariffs. (CFR Daily News Brief 2026; BEA news release, 2026)

Besides, institutional double standards generated by whimsical tariff policies and export controls have also caused problems of credibility gap. China and other nations around the world increasingly view these unilateral measures as a way for the U.S. to protect their interests while preaching liberal principles like free trade and human rights to others.

This has also led to hedging fatigue, where other nations must navigate complex bilateral deals without the stability of a global arbiter like the World Trade Organization.

Alternative trade blocs are developing. In response to U.S. protectionism, other major economies are forming alternative trade coalitions that explicitly exclude the United States. For example, The European Union has proposed linking with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership to create an alternative economic powerhouse. The BRICS bloc has expanded to include new members like Indonesia and Vietnam, dabbling parallel financial systems to reduce dollar dependence.

4.2. Hegemony stability vs power transition

The tension between hegemonic stability theory (HST) and power transition theory (PTT) explains why U.S. trade policy towards China has shifted to become geoeconomic weapons. Both theories form the backbone to discuss international order.

Power transition theory (PTT) was proposed by A.F.K. Organski in his 1958 book *World Politics*. PTT holds that a nation that achieves hegemony will ultimately be challenged by a rising nation dissatisfied with the status quo.

Although the ideas originated with Charles Kindleberger’s research on the Great Depression, Robert Keohane coined the term Hegemonic Stability Theory in 1980. He synthesized and formalized the realist argument that a stable, open international economic order requires a single dominant power to establish and enforce the rules. HST argues that the international system, including treaties and trade, enjoys more stability when a single nation-state

is the dominant player. From a neoliberal perspective, Robert Keohane observed in his 1984 book, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, that “International regimes are easier to maintain than to create... Once a regime is established, the costs of its maintenance are likely to be lower than the costs of its creation.” (p100)

In view of this, PTT and HST reveals why in his first term, Trump launched trade war against China and in his Second term why his administration has escalated tariff and export control policies. These policies are also clear manifest of weaponizing trade policies for geopolitical ends. Trade measures like the CHIPS and Science Act are forms of geoeconomic tools. The goal is to slow down China’s growth in strategic sectors such as AI, quantum computing, semiconductors. Decoupling or de-risking represents the strategy of prioritizing security over profit to maintain a structural lead in the hierarchy of power.

From PTT standpoint, A.F.K. Organski once said “the greatest danger to peace and stability lies not in a massive gap between powers, but in the period when a dissatisfied challenger approaches the strength of the dominant state.” (1958, p326) In this vein, it seems that “if history repeats itself, PTT and HST would expect that China is likely to be a powerful and dissatisfied revisionist power. (Younn Shwe Sin Htay, 2021, p4) From a pessimistic and realist take on HST, Robert Gilpin argued, in *War and Change in World Politics* (1981), that “as the relative power of a hegemon declines, the incentives for a rising challenger to change the system increase, leading to systemic instability and potential conflict.” (p187) He also contended that “The costs of maintaining the status quo tend to rise faster than the capacity of the hegemon to support it.” (p. 156)

However, reality of the U.S. trade policies towards China unfolds a quite different scenario. As a rising power, China is acting as a **system stabilizer**, while the U.S. is challenging the status quo, withdrawing from multilateral organizations and almost starving WTO to death. Trump administration’s America First rhetoric and conviction that the liberal order’s rules and institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, have militated against US interests proves that the United States are not satisfied with the Status quo. US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, also asserted at his Senate confirmation hearing that “it is an order that has perished.” It is obvious that the United States are challenging and undermining the current multilateral system rather than a rising China. The declining hegemon believes the current world order does not serve its own economic and national security interests so it deconstructs the system to create a new order which governments from Trump to Biden believe will eliminate all the ills of their domestic systemic problems like mounting national debt, political and culture polarization, the conflicts between social elites and MAGA Americans.

During President Trump’s second term (2025–2026), the United States enacted an unprecedented scale of disengagement from multilateral organizations. On January 7, 2026, President Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum directing the withdrawal of the U.S. from 66 international organizations, conventions, and treaties, labeling them “anti-American, useless, or wasteful”. (White House Fact Sheet) While the U.S. has accelerated its withdrawal from global institutions, China has acted as the primary defender of the multilateral system and advocated for “staying true to multilateralism”. (Wang Yi, 2025) This involves both fortifying existing UN-centered frameworks and helping to fill the vacuum left by the U.S. Contrary to the expected scenarios of HST and PTT, China is attempting to step into the role of a system stabilizer by providing the public goods that the U.S. is no longer willing to provide instead of challenging the current system. China supports a “member-driven” reform work plan for the WTO’s 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14), advocating for “agile decision-making” and flexible plurilateral initiatives. As the rotating president of APEC 2026, China is pushing for the “Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific,” acting as a stabilizing force amid global trade fragmentation. (WTO, 2026)

4.3. Great power competition vs the community with a shared future for mankind

Great Power Competition (GPC) is defined as a structural geostrategic framework where the world’s most capable states intensively vie for relative status, influence, and the power to shape global rules. In late 2017 when the United States published its National Security Strategy and declared a formal end to the 25-year era of United

States-led globalization and active American democratization initiatives, it acknowledged the world that great power competition began. (Campbell and Sullivan, 2019; Lynch, 2020; Lynch, 2024)

Driven primarily by GPC, the United States is redefining national security and conceptualizing it as threats to a fusion of interrelated spheres of national strength including economic and technological power. This is exemplified in a dramatic expansion in U.S. investment and trade measures based upon the retention of superiority in an array of power spheres and denying China access to critical technologies.

Consequently, great power competition has ushered in the return of geoeconomics, where the US trade policy towards China is defined by strategic rivalry, economic decoupling/derisking, and technology controls. American trade policy aims to secure critical supply chains and protect technological superiority through export control, industrial policy and investment restrictions. More importantly, it wants to delay, blunt or contain China's development.

Thus, from the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the "New Washington Consensus"ⁱ, trade policies are increasingly weaponized to secure American technological, military, and economic superiority over China.

While academia and politician in the United States expressed disappointment that economic integration didn't change China according to Americans' imagination and the development tracks that they prescribed for China, the accession to WTO and China's phenomenal economic development has integrated China into the world economy, which the United States also weaponized. Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman explained the rise of weaponized interdependence as the ability of powerful actors, namely the United States, to use their control of crucial nodes and chokepoints in a globalized economy to coerce and weaken their rivals.

"For much of this century, the United States has had an unrivaled ability to exploit weaponized interdependence, due to its dominance of the international financial system and much of the infrastructure that underpins the internet." Consider the Science and Chips Act and American BIS' continuous entity listⁱⁱ. The U.S. has leveraged geoeconomics tools that underpinned the semiconductor export controls to contain or blunt China's development and long armed its trade partners and allies to take action as well. (Farrell and Newman, 2019, 2025)

In the tariff war launched by President Trump in the past year, however, China has unfolded powerful rare earth export controls of its own and demonstrated that weaponized interdependence can be a boomerang on the initiator. In addition, the boomerang effect also means that China will be motivated to develop alternative innovation both in terms of technology and system. Weaponized interdependence can also lead to route avoidance of middle powers, and long-term erosion of the initiator's own power.

In contrast, a community with shared future for mankind envisions a new type of international relations characterized by shared prosperity, sustainability, and collaboration, effectively promoting a shift away from traditional power politics towards creating a better future for all.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the primary practical platform for implementing the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. It acts as a concrete roadmap for promoting global development, prosperity, and shared governance. It injects renewed vigor into multilateralism when it is facing great challenges. It aims to build a new model of economic and cultural cooperation that transcends traditional "zero-sum" geopolitical thinking. Beyond expanding trade relations, the BRI also promotes people-to-people exchanges, infrastructure improvement, and green development. (Xinhua, 2024)

In just over a decade, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become one of the world's largest and most comprehensive international cooperation platforms. It has revitalized ancient trade routes with new energy, introducing fresh opportunities and vitality to global trade and economic collaboration. "BRI projects have improved infrastructure development and connectivity, created tens of thousands of jobs," said Thong Mengdaiv, a lecturer at the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy of the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

“Through its focus on strategic alignment and complementary strengths, the BRI promotes a shared vision of peaceful development, win-win cooperation and mutual prosperity,” the Cambodian scholar pointed out. (Xinhua, 2026)The following are but a few examples of the numerous benefits and opportunities the BRI has delivered to its trading partners.

Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Judith Suminwa Tuluka has praised infrastructure cooperation between the DRC and China, saying it has continued to drive the African country’s economic and social development by improving domestic transportation and strengthening regional connectivity. (Xinhua, 2026, DR Congo PM)

Ecological rehabilitation is also a major focus of BRI. SZC, jointly formed by China’s Zijin Mining Group Co., Ltd. and the Serbian government in 2018, has pushed for the copper mines’ green transition by upgrading the facilities, strengthening technical management, and introducing green mining concepts and rehabilitation technologies. By adhering to the sustainable concept of “mining with environmental care” over the past eight years, the Chinese enterprise has effectively improved the environmental quality of the Bor mining area. Sasa Maksimovski, head of SZC’s ecology department, told Xinhua that over the past seven years, the company has completed about 4.3 million square meters of landscaping and planted around 1.3 million saplings. “You can see these projects with your own eyes on site; it is already a sea of green,” he said. (Xinhua, 2026, China’s green transition)

The Luban Workshop, a project named after an ancient Chinese master craftsman to provide vocational skills training for local people, has been established in 30 countries, training thousands of skilled professionals. Since the first Luban Workshop was launched in Thailand in 2016, more than 30 have been set up across Asia, Europe, and Africa, offering education to nearly 10,000 students and vocational training to over 31,000 participants. (Xinhua, 2026 How vocational)

5. Conclusion

Examining U.S. trade policy towards China since Trump first administration shows that geoeconomics is simply “other means for war”, which is typically the use of economic instruments such as sanctions, investment barriers, export control, and trade policies to achieve geopolitical goals. Analyzing U.S. trade policy towards China through the framework of a three-layered concentric circle reveals that weaponizing interdependence, deconstructing multilateral trade mechanism like WTO and “double down on the small yard, high fence” (Sullivan, 2026) will fragment supply chains, reduce global economic efficiency, upset global economic order. Unfortunately, it will also boomerang on the initiator, greatly compromising the well-being of American people. Whereas, as an important channel for implementing the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which promotes people-to-people exchanges, infrastructure improvement, and green development, has yielded rich harvest for its trade partners.

In the historic meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump, the two heads of state agreed on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability. This framework is expected to provide strategic guidance for China-US relations over the next three years and beyond. Against this background, U.S. trade policies towards China need to transcend the geopolitical strategies of outcompeting China and reframe the bilateral trade relations in the framework of managing competition and expanding cooperative opportunities.

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ⁱ Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution" (speech, Washington, DC, April 27, 2023), The White House.

ⁱⁱ The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) Entity List is a U.S. trade restriction list (15 CFR §744) identifying foreign persons, businesses, and organizations deemed contrary to U.S. national security or foreign policy interests. It mandates licenses for exporting, re-exporting, or transferring items (specifically technology and software) to listed parties, often with a "presumption of denial".