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MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN THE UNIPOLARITY: LESSONS FOR SECURITY DYNAMICS OF US-CHINA RELATIONS AMID TRUMP'S SECOND TERM**

Abstract

Humanitarian interventionism, a hallmark of the unipolar era following the Cold War, has been widely debated as a mechanism for addressing alleged human rights violations and safeguarding global security. Rooted in principles such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), these interventions have often intersected with the strategic interests of dominant powers, particularly the United States. This paper examines the evolving dynamics of humanitarian intervention within the shifting geopolitical landscape, focusing on the implications for US-China relations during President Donald Trump's second term in office. Building on historical precedents and theoretical frameworks, the study analyzes how the US might invoke humanitarian intervention as a dual-purpose tool – asserting moral leadership while countering China's growing influence in regions of strategic interest. It further explores the challenges of applying lessons from interventions in the unipolar era to a world increasingly defined by multipolarity and

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strategic rivalry. By contextualizing Trump's assertive foreign policy stance and examining potential justifications for interventionism, the paper offers critical insights into how humanitarian motives might align with or mask broader geopolitical objectives. Consequently, this analysis sheds light on the security implications for US-China relations, contributing to the wider discourse on the intersection of ethics, power, and global governance.

Keywords: Humanitarian intervention, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), US-China relations, Donald Trump, strategic rivalry, global governance

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian interventionism emerged as a defining feature of global governance in the unipolar era, particularly under the leadership of the United States during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left the US as the unchallenged global hegemon, allowing it to act as the principal arbiter of international norms, including the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights. These interventions were frequently framed within the normative principles of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, the ethical justifications often coincided with strategic and geopolitical considerations, underscoring the dual-purpose nature of such actions (Wippman 1995). The unipolar structure provided both the justification and capability for the US to engage in interventions, often circumventing the complexities of multilateral decision-making while consolidating its strategic influence in regions of interest. Key cases, such as NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, in Afghanistan (2001), and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, highlight how proclaimed "humanitarian" motives were deployed to rally international and domestic support. While these interventions aimed to address pressing human rights issues, they also served broader objectives, including reinforcing US hegemony and establishing strategic footholds in pivotal regions (Kerton-Johnson 2010). This interplay between ethics and power projection became a hallmark of the unipolar era, shaping

global security dynamics and setting a precedent for using humanitarian rhetoric in foreign policy.

From the post-Iraq invasion period to the late 2010s, the global landscape for military interventions experienced significant transformations. The disillusionment with the prolonged engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the perceived failures of interventions in Libya and Syria, catalyzed a reevaluation of the role of military force in achieving humanitarian objectives. Under the Obama administration, a shift towards multilateralism and reliance on airpower, exemplified by the “leading from behind” strategy in Libya (2011), indicated a cautious recalibration of US interventionist policies (Chesterman 2011). Despite this, the enduring use of drone strikes and targeted operations underscored the persistence of interventionist tendencies under the guise of reduced direct engagement, blending technological superiority with ethical narratives of precision and minimal civilian harm. By the time of the Trump administration’s first term (2017–2021), US military interventionism had entered an era of pronounced unpredictability. While Trump publicly criticized the failures of past interventions, his policies often demonstrated a transactional approach, where the rhetoric of non-interventionism clashed with actions that prioritized strategic interests, such as increased military activity in the Indo-Pacific or the assassination of Qassem Soleimani in 2020. The administration’s selective use of force reflected an evolving narrative that combined traditional justifications of national security with appeals to restoring American strength. This duality signalled the enduring relevance of interventionism, albeit reshaped to fit the contours of an increasingly contested and multipolar international order.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, culminating on August 30, marked the end of a two-decade military engagement that began in response to the September 11 attacks. The decision to withdraw was influenced by a combination of factors, including the diminishing American national interest in Afghanistan, as articulated by President Biden, who emphasized the need to “refocus resources on countering global threats rather than attempting to reshape Afghan society into a modern democracy” (The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization China [US NATO] 2021). Critics argue that the withdrawal was executed hastily and without adequate planning for the security of

both US personnel and Afghan allies, resulting in a chaotic evacuation and a resurgence of Taliban control over the country. With the re-election of Donald Trump in November 2024, efforts to explain and predict humanitarian interventionism enter a new phase, reflecting the complexities of an emerging multipolar world. Trump's approach to foreign policy during his first term – characterized by assertiveness, unilateralism, and overt rivalry with China – offers critical insights into the potential evolution of US interventionist policies. While Trump's rhetoric often rejected globalist ideals, his administration skillfully framed US actions through moral and strategic necessity narratives. This dual-purpose approach, combining ethical justification with geopolitical calculation, is likely to reemerge in a second term, albeit shaped by the challenges of a more contested international order. Such dynamics of US-China relations provide a critical lens to examine the intersection of humanitarian interventionism and great-power competition. Recently, China has continued to assert its influence on the global stage, while the USA faces the challenge of maintaining its leadership role in an increasingly multipolar world. Heightened tensions over trade, human rights, and regional security characterize an evolving rivalry. Trump's first term laid the groundwork for an intensified economic confrontation, exemplified by the trade war and efforts to decouple critical sectors of the two economies. Simultaneously, the administration sought to project strength in the Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing alliances and countering China's assertive actions in contested areas such as the South China Sea (Harding 2019; Pant and Parpiani 2020).

The analysis commences by examining the factors that justified military interventionism during the unipolar era, exploring how the US utilized its dominance to shape global security policies. It then explores US-China relations during Trump's second administration, considering potential policy trajectories and their implications for bilateral ties. Security dynamics are also addressed, with a particular emphasis on military tensions and their influence on the strategic postures of both nations. Finally, the paper contextualizes these themes within the broader framework of global stability, contemplating the lessons that contemporary powers like China might draw from US behavior in the unipolar era as they navigate the complexities of a multipolar world.

JUSTIFYING MILITARY INTERVENTIONISM POLICY DURING UNIPOLARITY

Within the unipolar era, typically framed between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global economic crisis of 2009 (Schweller and Pu 2011), military interventions were predominantly justified through liberal arguments, emphasizing the protection of human rights, the fight against terrorism, and the safeguarding of US national security interests worldwide (Sullivan and Koch 2009). At their core, these policies often involve the unilateral use of force, with geography playing a pivotal role in determining strategic regions of interest, such as those rich in resources or critical for trade routes. Dominant superpower – the USA, frequently invoked the principle of hegemonic stability (see more in Kindleberger 1974) to justify interventions, framing them as necessary for maintaining international order, while economic motivations – such as securing resources or markets – often underpin these actions (Kavanagh et al. 2019). Charles Kindleberger's (1974) contribution to hegemonic stability theory argued that a stable global economy requires a hegemonic power to provide public goods, such as liquidity and a stable monetary system, to prevent economic crises and disorder. Components of military interventions also include them as tools for asserting the power and status of great powers on the global stage, reinforcing perceptions of strength and influence. Strategic objectives, including deterring rivals and protecting allies, are particularly evident in US-led interventions. Additionally, the internalization of domestic conflicts, where internal state crises attract external involvement under the pretext of regional stability, highlights the pragmatic use of interventionism (Stekić 2021). Geopolitical codes further shape interventionist decisions, aligning military actions with broader foreign policy priorities. In the unipolar era, humanitarian justifications, such as protecting human rights or preventing atrocities, have been employed to legitimize interventions, often blending ethical narratives with strategic aims (Stekić 2021). Finally, the promotion of democratization has been pragmatically exploited as a foreign policy tool, serving as both a justification for regime change and a means to expand influence, revealing the dual-purpose nature of interventionist policies. The justification for humanitarian intervention has continuously operated at the intersection of ethical imperatives

and strategic interests. Post-Cold War interventions such as those in Yugoslavia (1999) and Libya (2011) were underscored by humanitarian crises but also reflected geopolitical calculations. For instance, armed aggression against Yugoslavia highlighted NATO's resolve to assert dominance in Europe, while Libya illustrated the challenges of regime change under the guise of human rights protection. These precedents shaped the discourse around R2P, which sought to provide a moral and legal basis for intervention. Stekić (2021) identifies the following explanations for the justification of military interventions: the geography of interventionist politics, hegemonic stability, lucrative motives for military interventions, the power and status of the intervening actor, and strategic reasoning behind military interventions.

Under Trump's leadership, the justification for military interventions takes on a distinctive character. Though his administration did not commence any open war, they often employed securitized narratives, emphasizing the defense of US national interests over abstract principles of global governance (Trump 2017). However, this does not preclude using humanitarian rhetoric as a veneer for interventions driven by geopolitical competition (as stated in the US National Security Strategy adopted in 2017). For example, the Trump administration's rhetoric on China, including criticism of its approach to Uyghur Muslims and the situation in Hong Kong, has been leveraged to justify interventions aimed at limiting Beijing's growing influence. These actions reflect the assertion in the National Security Strategy that "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests" (White House 2017), revealing a strategic narrative designed to bolster US dominance. Trump's transactional worldview also positions economic and strategic gains as critical components of interventionist policies. In regions where China has made significant inroads, such as Africa and Southeast Asia, the US might frame interventions as both a moral imperative and a countermeasure to Chinese expansionism. The intertwining of ethics and strategy thus becomes a hallmark of US interventionism in an era of heightened great-power rivalry.

PROSPECT OF US-CHINA RELATIONS DURING TRUMP 2.0

The first Trump administration's foreign policy was notable for its focus on recalibrating US global commitments while intensifying efforts to counter perceived threats to national security. Although at least 65 active-duty US troops lost their lives in hostile actions during Trump's first term, mainly due to operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and targeted airstrikes, such as those on Syria following a chemical weapons attack (The Kessler 2024), the administration refrained from initiating a new large-scale military conflict. This restraint departed from previous administrations and underscored Trump's preference for leveraging economic and strategic tools over direct military engagement. However, this may not be true for his second administration in January 2025. The USA is expected to adopt more assertive measures to defend its superpower status, especially in response to the rising influence of China. This shift suggests a potential intensification of strategic competition, where geopolitical pressures could challenge the restraint shown during Trump's earlier term. During his first term, Trump pursued an aggressive stance toward China, marked by trade wars, military posturing in the Indo-Pacific, and attempts to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These actions were underpinned by a broader strategic goal of containing China's rise and preserving US dominance in key regions. Humanitarian interventions could emerge as a tool in this strategic competition. For instance, the US might escalate its rhetoric on human rights violations in Xinjiang or Myanmar, using these issues to justify actions that challenge China's regional influence. Similarly, in the South China Sea, where China's assertiveness has heightened tensions, the US could justify its military presence as a protective measure for smaller nations facing coercion (Scobell 2018). Andrew Scobell (2018) argues that the South China Sea represents a theatre where a security dilemma unfolds between the two powers, yet neither side appears willing to acknowledge this dynamic (223) openly. China's response to such interventions would likely be shaped by its principle of non-interference and its growing assertiveness on the global stage. Beijing has consistently opposed interventions that undermine state sovereignty, mainly when such actions appear to

target its strategic interests. However, China's behavior, including its policies to the militarization of the South China Sea, complicates its position, potentially exposing it to accusations of double standards. Trump's second term could exacerbate these tensions as both powers seek to leverage humanitarian narratives to advance their geopolitical objectives. The US might emphasize China's alleged human rights abuses to delegitimize Beijing's leadership role, while China could counter by highlighting the inconsistency of US interventions and their often destabilizing effects.

The trajectory of US-China relations during Donald Trump's new administration in 2025 is poised to deepen the strategic competition that marked his first term. Economic protectionism, military posturing, and selective diplomacy will likely characterize the bilateral relationship, further entrenching the rivalry between the world's two largest economies. Some scholars argue that China's recent development strategy, designed to safeguard its domestic economy from external disruptions, has yielded remarkable results (Stanojević and Zakić 2023). The significant shift in China's development paradigm—centered on domestic production to meet internal demand and supported by internal financial resources—has reduced the share of international indicators within the Chinese economy (2023, 80–81). Despite Trump's aggressive rhetoric, there may still be opportunities for selective diplomacy (Russell 2024). Historical patterns suggest that Trump is willing to negotiate when he perceives a transactional benefit, as seen in his first-term trade negotiations (Russell 2024). Potential areas for dialogue could include climate change, public health, or counterterrorism, where mutual interests align. However, Trump's unpredictable approach to diplomacy and tendency to undermine traditional alliances could weaken the broader US position in Asia. For instance, his isolationist tendencies may alienate regional partners, allowing China to strengthen its influence through economic incentives and multilateral frameworks like the BRI. Moreover, Trump's inconsistent messaging and unilateral decision-making may erode US domestic and international leadership confidence. This could embolden China to adopt more assertive policies, particularly in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, where Beijing's influence is already expanding.

The security dimension of US-China relations is likely to grow increasingly volatile. Trump's administration is expected to maintain its hardline stance on Taiwan, reinforcing commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act and continuing robust arms sales to the island (Hsiao 2024). The US military presence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, is anticipated to escalate as a counterbalance to Chinese territorial claims. Beijing's response to these actions could include intensified military drills near Taiwan, increased patrols in contested waters, and enhanced military coordination with Russia. The strategic partnership between China and Russia, already bolstered by shared opposition to US hegemony, may present a dual-front challenge to American security interests. According to Russell Hsiao, this trajectory signals continuity from the Biden and first Trump administrations, further aligning Washington and Taipei (Hsiao 2024). The potential for miscalculation is particularly acute in this volatile setting. Heightened military interactions between US and Chinese forces significantly increase the risk of unintended confrontations, especially in critical flashpoints like the Taiwan Strait (Hsiao 2024).

In their article published in 2016, Saunders and Bowie explored the prospects for Sino-US military-to-military relations, arguing that while there has been a more positive stance from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) toward such contacts, this shift reflects a tactical rather than strategic change. The PLA's approach is driven by a desire to stabilize relations with the US rather than fundamentally altering its long-term military strategy. Saunders and Bowie (2016) caution that if efforts to establish a "new type of major power relationship" fail, the corresponding military relationship will also likely falter. They emphasize that several factors contribute to a pessimistic outlook for sustained and productive military-to-military cooperation. One key challenge identified is the increasing military competition between the United States and China in critical strategic domains such as space and cyber capabilities. The PLA views these domains as essential for achieving information dominance in modern warfare, paralleling the US military's assessment of their importance. Chinese investments in counter-space technologies, such as anti-satellite weapons, and the PLA's perceived targeting of US military vulnerabilities in cyberspace

exacerbate mutual distrust. US policymakers see these actions as threatening, while Chinese denials of such operations fail to provide reassurance, further eroding trust (Saunders and Bowie 2016).

William Matthews (2024) contends that Trump's "America First" foreign policy will likely accelerate China's pursuit of global leadership. He argues that China's primary objectives will be setting norms in emerging technologies and leveraging its artificial intelligence and telecommunications dominance. Ultimately, Matthews emphasizes that China's most significant influence will continue to arise from its trade and technological capabilities, where it has already secured a leading role (Matthews 2024). The second Trump administration's key challenge concerning China, Matthews suggests, will be its "reduced global commitments". This withdrawal could enable Beijing to advance its Global Security Initiative (GSI), spreading Chinese security norms while protecting its economic interests (Matthews 2024).

Chase et al. (2018) argue that China's military modernization poses two significant and interconnected challenges to the United States military in the Asia-Pacific region. First, maintaining a technological advantage has become increasingly difficult in an era characterized by rapid innovation and globalization of the technology base. The traditional US superiority in high-quality weapons systems is eroding as China leverages advancements in the commercial sector, which has democratized access to cutting-edge technologies. This development has created an environment where China can effectively mimic or compete with US advancements, challenging the long-standing US dominance in military technology (Chase et al. 2018). Second, the modernization of the PLA has bolstered China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which are designed to deter or complicate US military intervention in the region. Chase et al. (2018) note that China's geographic proximity to potential conflict zones provides a strategic advantage, allowing it to project power and counter US operations more effectively. For instance, retired Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo asserts that geographical advantages would make Chinese forces formidable despite overall US military superiority in conflicts near China's periphery.

Moreover, advancements in Chinese missile systems, air defenses, and naval platforms have significantly enhanced its ability to contest US operations and protect its regional interests (Chase et al. 2018).

Finally, Saunders and Bowie (2016) highlight declining US confidence in the value of military contacts as a tool to influence Chinese military behavior. While the US has traditionally seen such engagement as a means to build understanding and manage crises, the rigid structure of the PLA and its officers' limited decision-making autonomy have minimized the operational benefits of these interactions. Consequently, US policymakers are increasingly sceptical about the efficacy of military-to-military engagement in shaping China's strategic behavior (Saunders and Bowie 2016).

The evolution of US-China relations under Trump's new administration will likely reinforce the trend toward strategic decoupling and great-power competition. Several key dynamics are worth noting. The contest over emerging technologies, particularly in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and 5G, is expected to intensify as the Trump administration expands restrictions on Chinese tech firms and increases domestic investments in critical technologies to maintain US dominance. This technological rivalry intersects with broader economic fragmentation, as escalating trade disputes and the potential revocation of the most favoured nation status accelerate the decoupling of the US and Chinese economies. Such developments risk creating fragmented global markets, placing smaller nations reliant on both superpowers in a precarious position as they attempt to navigate an increasingly polarized economic and technological landscape. Russell (2024) contends that the president-elect's proposed tariff measures – ranging up to 60% on imports from China and 20% on goods from other nations – pose significant risks to global economic stability. These actions could disrupt trade flows, exacerbate inflationary pressures, and necessitate tighter monetary policies, ultimately hindering global economic growth (Russell 2024). Second, the intensifying US-China rivalry will exert significant pressure on Asia-Pacific nations, compelling them to align with one of the two powers. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in Southeast Asia, where both Washington and Beijing are actively vying for influence. Third, the competition extends to the technological domain, with a growing contest over emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and 5G. The Trump administration is expected to expand restrictions on Chinese tech firms while increasing domestic investments in critical

technologies to preserve US dominance. Simultaneously, this rivalry poses serious challenges to global governance, as the antagonistic relationship between the two powers undermines multilateral institutions and norms. The prioritization of unilateral actions over cooperative solutions risks complicating collective efforts to address transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and cyber threats. Moreover, the convergence of economic, military, and ideological conflicts heightens the risk of broader confrontation, necessitating effective crisis management mechanisms to prevent escalation and safeguard regional stability.

DISCUSSION

The correlation between humanitarian interventionism and great-power competition, as two main variables, raises critical questions about the future of global governance. In a multipolar world, where power is increasingly distributed among multiple actors, the unilateralism that defined the unipolar era faces significant challenges. The United States, despite its relative decline, remains a formidable actor, capable of shaping international norms and policies. However, its actions are increasingly contested by emerging powers like China (White House 2017), which seeks to redefine the rules of engagement. This paper explores the possibility that, in a second term, the Trump administration might further integrate security considerations into humanitarian discourse, aligning moral justifications with strategic interests. While Trump's first-term foreign policy was primarily guided by national interest, as reflected in the 'America First' doctrine, instances such as military aid to Venezuela and selective interventions in Syria suggest that humanitarian narratives were occasionally employed in ways that reinforced U.S. strategic objectives. Thus, rather than arguing for a fundamental shift, this paper examines how humanitarian interventionism, when securitized, could still serve national priorities. Such an approach risks deepening global divisions as interventions become arenas for great-power rivalry rather than genuine efforts to address humanitarian crises. The implications for Sino-American relations are profound, with each intervention potentially escalating tensions and undermining prospects for cooperation on global challenges. Lessons of the unipolar

era underscore the complexity of interventionism in a changing world. While R2P provides a normative framework, its application has often been inconsistent, shaped more by power dynamics than ethical considerations. The challenge for policymakers lies in navigating these issues while maintaining a commitment to global stability and human rights. Future research should, as suggested by some studies, explore alternative models of intervention that prioritize multilateralism and local agency, reducing the dominance of great-power interests (Smith 2007; Rauta 2020; Dawson 2022; Jansen and Kramer 2023). Comparative studies on different administrations' approaches to interventionism could also provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of global governance.

During Trump's first term, his administration adopted a distinctive approach to military interventions. While traditional humanitarian justifications were occasionally invoked, they were frequently overshadowed by narratives prioritizing US national security and economic interests. This pattern suggests that under Trump, humanitarian rhetoric served as a pragmatic tool rather than a guiding principle, often used to legitimize actions aimed at countering geopolitical competitors like China. During the first term, the Trump administration's policies, characterized by aggressive trade measures and military posturing in the Indo-Pacific, highlight a willingness to leverage human rights narratives for strategic purposes. Issues such as the alleged treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the political unrest in Hong Kong, which America and its EU partners bring to the international agenda, exemplify areas where humanitarian concerns could be instrumentalized to challenge China's influence (Mitić 2024). China, however, adheres to a longstanding principle of non-interference in state sovereignty, a stance central to its foreign policy identity. Yet, its actions – such as the crackdown in Hong Kong and assertive manoeuvres in the South China Sea – complicate this position, exposing Beijing to accusations by the USA. As both nations utilize humanitarian discourse to bolster their strategic goals, the potential for heightened tensions and strategic miscalculations grows.

Economic confrontation further intensifies the rivalry between the two powers. Trump's first term saw the imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods, framed as measures addressing national security concerns. Such

actions escalated trade tensions and laid the groundwork for possibly decoupling the two economies. Should Trump pursue even more drastic measures, such as revoking China's Most-Favored-Nation status, the resulting disruptions to global supply chains could reverberate across the international economic order. In response, China has sought to reduce its reliance on US markets through initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signalling a potential reconfiguration of global trade networks. In the security realm, US-China relations have grown increasingly volatile. Trump's staunch support for Taiwan and expanded freedom of navigation operations in contested waters reflect a hardline stance that risks provoking aggressive responses from Beijing. China's ongoing military modernization further complicates US strategic calculations, challenging its dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. This military rivalry, characterized by growing capabilities on both sides, heightens the risk of unintended confrontations that could destabilize the region.

What could further complicate the security situation are potential areas of overlapping interests. In his paper Stekić (2022) provided a detailed analysis of the Pentagon's institutional perspective on China's military and security developments over the past two decades. This author focused on four critical areas that underscore the strategic complexities of contemporary global geopolitics. He argues that initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the AUKUS pact illustrate the US's attempt to counter China's rise, albeit through fragmented and poorly coordinated strategies. The QUAD, revitalized during the Trump and Biden administrations, remains an informal alliance with limited cohesion. Similarly, AUKUS, centered on technology, submarine development, and information sharing, lacks the defense depth to function as a robust containment mechanism. Stekić (2022) views these initiatives not as rational foreign policy moves but as instruments of securitization, legitimizing efforts to portray China as a global threat. Taiwan emerges as a pivotal element in the US's Indo-Pacific policy, with military support for the island framed as a deterrent against China's ambitions. However, such actions risk provoking Beijing, which could justify military intervention under the pretense of safeguarding sovereignty. The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan further complicates the geopolitical landscape, leaving a

power vacuum that China cautiously engages with through soft power initiatives under its Belt and Road Initiative. While Afghanistan remains critical for China's terrestrial New Silk Road, Beijing has yet to establish significant military or investment commitments under the Taliban regime. Additionally, the Arctic region becomes a novel battleground, where China's ambitions to secure trade routes have drawn sharp criticism from the US, potentially escalating tensions in this resource-rich region. Given the modern international system's complexity, these fragmented US policies reflect an outdated Cold War mindset, unlikely to succeed in containing China. Thus, some authors outline two possible trajectories for global power dynamics: prolonged tripolarity involving the US, China, and Russia, or a soft bipolarity where China dominates Eurasia while the US controls the Rimland (Stekić 2022). These scenarios reveal the reactive and often disjointed nature of US strategic planning.

The interplay between US and Chinese officials' statements on key geopolitical issues during Trump's second term also sheds light on the evolving dynamics of potential military engagement. In 2024, the Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, highlighted the importance of China's influence over North Korea, particularly in curbing military activities that could exacerbate regional tensions (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2024). This reflects a broader US strategy to enlist China's cooperation in maintaining stability in the face of rising global uncertainties. In parallel, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan emphasized the critical need for military engagement with China to foster mutual understanding and reduce the risk of miscalculations, especially in the context of heightened tensions over Taiwan and other contentious issues (Lin and Liao 2024). These perspectives underscore the dual approach of seeking collaboration on shared concerns while managing strategic rivalries. Chinese officials, conversely, have consistently framed US actions as destabilizing. Lin Jian, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accused the US of political manipulation in the South China Sea, asserting China's commitment to peace and stability through partnerships with ASEAN nations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China [MFA PRC] 2024). This narrative portrays China as a stabilizing force countering perceived US interference,

reflecting Beijing's broader regional security strategy. The intersection of human rights concerns and geopolitical strategies is another critical dimension of Sino-American relations. During a statement at the Universal Periodic Review of China, US officials condemned human rights abuses in Xinjiang and other regions, linking these issues to broader diplomatic priorities (US Mission to International organization in Geneva 2024). The US stance highlights the interplay between moral imperatives and strategic interests in its foreign policy. The US seeks to challenge China's international standing by spotlighting human rights while reinforcing its global leadership role. China's response to such criticisms reflects its emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference. Geng Shuang, China's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, dismissed allegations of Chinese involvement in the Ukraine conflict, reiterating Beijing's support for immediate peace talks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China [MFA PRC] 2024). This aligns with China's narrative of prioritizing mediation over intervention, thereby positioning itself as a responsible global actor.

The issue of sovereignty remains a cornerstone of Sino-American relations, particularly concerning Taiwan. President Xi Jinping's reaffirmation of China's sovereignty over Taiwan and rejection of foreign interventions underscores Beijing's unwavering stance (Lin and Liao 2024). This non-negotiable position is central to China's domestic and foreign policy narratives, serving as a rallying point for national unity and resistance against external pressures. From the US perspective, its engagement on Taiwan reflects a balancing act between supporting a democratic ally and avoiding confrontation with China. This delicate equilibrium is further strained by military dialogues aimed at managing tensions, as articulated by Jake Sullivan (Lin and Liao 2024). The US approach to Taiwan exemplifies its broader strategy of competing with China while avoiding escalation. Despite Trump's broader isolationist tendencies, there remain opportunities for selective diplomacy that could mitigate tensions. Trump's transactional approach to foreign relations suggests a potential willingness to negotiate if perceived benefits align with his administration's priorities. However, this unpredictability risks alienating traditional allies, potentially weakening US influence in Asia. Meanwhile, China continues to consolidate its regional presence through economic initiatives such

as the Belt and Road Initiative, leveraging multilateral frameworks to expand its influence at the expense of US leadership. The intensifying rivalry between the United States and China during Trump's second term would have profound implications for global stability. As both nations navigate their competing interests, the ethical dimensions of humanitarian interventionism will likely remain intertwined with strategic calculations. This interplay will shape bilateral relations and influence broader trends in international governance, economic dynamics, and security architecture. Understanding the complexities of humanitarian interventionism within this geopolitical landscape is essential for anticipating its impact on US-China relations. The convergence of ethical considerations and power politics underscores the challenges of managing great power competition in an increasingly multipolar world. These developments warrant careful analysis, as they hold significant implications for the future of global stability and governance.

CONCLUSION

The paper argued that over the next five years, key security focal points in strategic competition will include regions characterized by political and security vacuums, such as Afghanistan, Syria, and post-conflict zones like Ukraine. Additionally, areas in the Middle East, particularly the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, where post-conflict reconstruction is urgently needed, will also gain prominence. A second category of critical spaces will emerge, shaped by the evolving dynamics of Sino-American strategic competition during this period. Examining humanitarian interventionism in the context of Sino-American relations during Donald Trump's first presidential term reveals a complex interplay between ethical imperatives and strategic interests. The evolution of this dynamic reflects broader shifts in global governance from a unipolar to a multipolar world, where the motivations behind interventions are increasingly intertwined with geopolitical competition. Humanitarian intervention, particularly under the framework of the R2P, has historically served as a mechanism for dominant powers to assert moral leadership while pursuing national interests. For instance, the interventions in Yugoslavia and Libya illustrate how humanitarian

crises can be leveraged to justify actions that align with strategic objectives. In the Trump administration, this dual-purpose approach is likely to persist, with humanitarian narratives potentially employed as justifications for interventions to counter China's influence in regions critical to US interests.

As Trump embarks on his second term, the US-China rivalry is poised to intensify. The administration's aggressive posture towards China, characterized by trade wars and military posturing, suggests that humanitarian rhetoric may increasingly be used to frame US actions in response to alleged human rights violations in regions such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong. This tactic not only seeks to delegitimize China's leadership but also serves as a means to reinforce US dominance in the Indo-Pacific. The potential for military confrontations in contested areas like the South China Sea and Taiwan remains high, mainly as both nations engage in heightened military posturing. The risk of miscalculation could lead to unintended escalations, drawing regional allies into conflicts that destabilize the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Economically, Trump's "America First" agenda complicates trade relations with China, with tariffs serving as tools for domestic political goals and broader strategic aims. This economic confrontation risks creating a bifurcated global trade system where the USA and China operate in increasingly isolated spheres, undermining the foundations of international trade and cooperation. Moreover, the selective engagement strategy adopted by Trump during his first mandate raises questions about the future of American leadership in Asia. While there may be opportunities for dialogue on shared interests like climate change and public health, Trump's isolationist tendencies could alienate regional partners and embolden China to expand its influence through initiatives like the BRI. Thus, the intersection of humanitarian interventionism and great-power rivalry underscores a critical juncture in global governance. The trajectory of the relations between the two most dominant superpowers will significantly shape global stability, necessitating careful consideration of how interventionist policies are framed and executed in an increasingly multipolar world.

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