

Since Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the United States have based China-US relations on a coherent, precise and continuous strategic approach towards China.

On the one hand the so-called engagement, whose purpose was to ensure that Beijing had to gain economically and politically front the regional order forged by the United States after the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, transforming China in a co-tutor of that order in Asia.

However, there was also a different goal that the American policy makers have pursued for thirty years, that is to say to create the conditions for an internal transformation of the Chinese institutional framework, from an autocratic to a democratic order. The original idea was to use the economic market-oriented reform to trigger a political mutation.

In brief, the hope was that the economic imperatives and the global commercial linkages with the western world could have gradually transformed the Chinese autocratic regime in liberal democracy.

If this was the main long-term goal, in the short term it was necessary for the US on the one hand to contain the regional hegemonic ambitions of the Chinese autocratic leadership, while on the other hand to prevent an arm race among the regional powers, caused by the increasing economic and military power that China was acquiring.

From an economic point of view, this strategy has produced extraordinary results. Indeed, the Chinese economic boom there would never have been without the Nixon Administration determination to open the doors of China to the rest of the world.

On the other hand, even the containment policy has produced excellent results, maintaining peace in the region and preventing a dangerous competition among the major power of the area.

However, what has not worked is the idea that the market-oriented economy would have caused an irresistible political transformation. Something happened in 1989 but the Chinese authorities stopped violently that process.

Since then the Chinese Communist Party not only has preserved its role and strength its power, but in recent has increased his grip on the country, while reducing the autonomy of the market and the independence of civil society.

Moreover, China, which has become the second economic power in the world, has gradually used its economic power to acquire a growing political and military power, now openly showing its ambitions, that is to say to forge in the mid-term a regional sinocentric order, with two different tools: the Asian International Investment Bank (AIIB) and Two Silk Road Strategy, and in the long run to create international order alternative to the American liberal-democratic order institutionalized after the Second World War.

In brief, the economic Chinese boom, and its growing interconnection with the global economy, have not produced a political change but have strengthened the autocratic power of the Chinese Communist Party.

This is probably the reason why, acknowledged this failure, the US policy makers have adopted a different approach changing the United States foreign policy towards China.

On the one hand the end of the engagement approach, this is the case of the Donald Trump's threat to impose a 45 percent tariff on imports from China. On the other hand, a strengthening of the containment approach with the "Pivot to Asia", which means an increasing US military presence in the area, and in some case a new harder approach, that is to the "the role back", this is the case of the phone call between president Trump and the Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen.

This new approach is a great source of apprehension for the Chinese authorities, whose greatest fear is the beginning of a protectionist era that can dramatically hurt the Chinese economic development.

Moreover, during the presidential campaign Donald Trump attacked China, accusing Beijing of currency manipulation. According to the CCP mouthpiece *Global Times*: "Almost all experts on US-China trade believe that Trump's declaration on the bilateral economy is unprofessional". Indeed, according to the Chinese point of view, the yuan's inclusion in the Special Drawing Right (SDR), an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves, has attested to the marketization of China's exchange rate. The CCP newspaper menace that if he does list China as a currency manipulator and slap steep tariffs on Chinese imports, China will take countermeasures. However, it is necessary to underline that in the last two decade the Treasury Department has always declined to label China a currency manipulator. Indeed, under a 1988 law, the Treasury is required to "assess whether major trading partners game their currencies to prevent balance-of-payments adjustments or to gain an unfair trade advantage". The last time the U.S. designated China a currency manipulator was in 1994, when Bill Clinton was president.

Moreover, the *Global Times* sustain that to impose a 45 per cent tariff on imports from China is merely campaign rhetoric. "The greatest authority a US president has is to impose tariffs of up to 15 per cent for 150 days on all imported goods and the limit can only be broken on the condition that the country is declared to be in a state of emergency. Other than that, a US president can only demand a tariff increase on individual commodities".

That said, it is possible to sustain that in order to implement the above mentioned strategy, that is to say the long term goal of regime change, transforming an autocratic regime in a liberal democracy, US policy makers in the past decade has passively accepted the disruption of the manufactured sector at home and a more and more assertive Chinese approach abroad. Now things may change and the new US president may pay more attention to the short term and to the economic and social suffering that globalization has caused within the United States.

However, this does not mean that the United States will automatically become protectionist.

Indeed, China's economy would surely suffer if the United States were to impose "a 45 percent tariff on nearly \$500 billion worth of Chinese imports. The United States absorbs only 16 percent of Chinese exports, but it is China's healthiest export market". Moreover, according to the *Wall Street Journal* "If Donald Trump sparks one with China, among the losers will be some of his most ardent supporters: blue-collar workers who helped sweep him to election victory. In fact, they'll stand to lose twice. They've already endured stagnant incomes for decades amid withering trade competition from China. Mr. Trump's threatened tariffs of 45% on all Chinese imports would hit their pocketbooks again by raising the price of pretty much everything on sale in Wal-Mart, from sneakers to microwave ovens".

As regards the political sphere, in a first phase, given the emphasis that Trump has placed during his election campaign on the concept of "America First", the new Administration may change the course of the US foreign policy and adopt an isolationist approach or favour same kind of disengagement, an option that may have disruptive consequences on the stability of the international order.

In fact, if the US adopt an isolationist approach, should entrust the management of the regional order to their allies in the area. In Asia, this means that the US should push Japan to assume a role of leadership in the regional.

However, a more assertive role of Tokyo in the area could open again the old wounds caused by the Japanese imperialism in the XX century, above all in China.

Consequently, Beijing could react vehemently and may openly contrast Japan regional leadership, implementing a more assertive policy.

Consequently, the US disengagement could trigger a series of actions and reactions that could easily get out of control.

This means that the new Trump administration, despite electoral slogans, may have no interest in delegating the administration of the status quo in Asia to its allies in the region.

That said it is possible to argue that the new Trump Administration may proceed on the same path of the Obama Administration in Asia but with a harder approach, that is to say a stronger economic and political containment towards China, in order to prevent that Beijing might acquire a political and military force able to threaten that status quo.

It is in this context that fits the phone call last December 2 between the president-elect Trump and the president of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen.

That phone call is a clear message that the new administration sends to Beijing: the United States is no longer willing to accept any Chinese attempt aimed at weaken the liberal order in Asia. Moreover, that phone call may represent the end of that short-term "blind eye" policy and the begin of that new harder stand necessary to contrast a more and more assertive China, above all in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. To that end the United States, this is probably the real meaning of that phone call, are willing also to consider the option of the Taipei independence and in the future to sustain Hong Kong claims for a greater autonomy.

All this means that in the coming years, the tensions between Beijing-Washington may constantly growth.