

USA foreign policy towards China according to mainstream American experts

The case of Ms Elisabeth Economy of Stanford University

Based upon Paolo Urio:

America and the China Threat
From the End of History to the End of Empire
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Ms. Elisabeth Economy (Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University) has posted an interesting article on the January/February issue of *Foreign Affairs*: ‘Xi Jinping’s New World Order. Can China Remake the International Order?’¹ Ms. Economy, who has published extensively on China and the US, is considered to be a renowned expert in this domain. Her article is an impressive analysis of China’s foreign policy by a ‘mainstream American expert’. It is also an excellent summary of the many ways the US establishment and its ‘experts’ employ to demonize China, in fact not only China’s foreign policy, but also, and maybe above all, its leaders and all the dimensions of the Chinese governance, abroad and at home. China and its leaders have become today what the Antichrists were during European religious history, i.e. persons opposing Christ or the Christian Churches.

Ms. Economy’s article presents practically all the biases this type of analysis is based upon:

1. The article begins by demonizing China’s leader, Xi Jinping.
2. The analysis is typically a-historical; when history is taken into account, only events that confirm the narrative are cherry-picked.
3. The article is full of projections of American imperial past and present upon China’s foreign policy (4 examples are briefly analysed).
4. China’s achievements are taken into consideration only as assets allowing China to implement its aggressive policy with the aim of replacing the US and the world it made and dominates, by a world dominated by China, a blatant misunderstanding of China’s foreign policy.
5. Consequently, the Belt and Road Initiative is taken into account only as proof China’s aggressive foreign policy.

¹ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-12-09/xi-jinpings-new-world-order>

6. The analysis shows that Ms. Economy (together with the majority of mainstream experts) has a serious problem with history, as she completely fails to take into consideration the wrongdoings of the US foreign policy, past and present.
7. The bottom line is that mainstream experts, such as Ms. Economy, and the US establishment they advise, are not ready to conceive of a different foreign policy.

I will end by pointing out the many, but marginalized, voices that have arisen in America from both the Left and traditional Right, providing a devastating critique of the US foreign policy.

Of course, every expert is entitled to defend his/her own country's foreign policy, on condition that this is based upon a rational, evidence-based analysis and not upon ideological *a-priori*. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Ms. Economy's article, as well as for the overwhelming majority of mainstream experts and think tanks' articles and reports. Moreover, by so supporting the foreign policy of their country, these experts cannot be considered as 'independent', as they are clearly the 'advisers and supporters of the Prince'. This may be a noble profession, on condition that it supports 'good behaviour', both at home and abroad. A careful analysis of Ms. Economy's article, and more generally of the articles and reports provided to the Prince by the mainstream think tanks, raises some serious doubts on the independence and nobility of their advice.

1. Demonizing the leader

With no surprise the article starts by diverting the attention of the reader away from China as a country and as a civilization (its history, culture and people) to its leader, Xi Jinping, who inevitably is demonized as the source of all problems, both in China and abroad. The scope of Xi's vision, she writes, 'connotes a radically transformed international order', to be dealt with hereafter. Putting the blame upon the leader has been a frequent stratagem used by mainstream experts, as well as by the US government (see for example among many: Putin, Bashar al Assad, Castro, Mossadegh, Maduro, Chavez, Allende). Of course, by doing so, the attention of the reader is, explicitly or implicitly, driven to conclude upon the dictatorial character of the 'regime' which oppresses (and often kills) its own people, who are thus

dissatisfied with their government's policies and will inevitably revolt demanding freedom, democracy and respect of human rights. Unfortunately, in the case of China, Ms. Economy does not mention the polls realized by Harvard University that show very clearly that the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people are very satisfied with their government, and the satisfaction has even increased in time (Cunningham, Edward, Tony Saich and Jessie Turiel (2020). *'Understanding CCP (Chinese Communist Party) Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time,'* Ash Center Programs for Democratic Governance, Harvard University, July).

2. The flaws of a-historical analysis

Most of the time, the analysis of mainstream experts is hopelessly a-historical: the American Empire is here to stay for ever as we have reached the end of history. When history is taken into account, they ignore the hard facts that contradict their narrative, and they cherry-pick the historical events that sustain the narrative of the benevolent Empire whose aim is to promote and diffuse democracy, free market (i.e., capitalism), and human rights, thereby providing peace and prosperity for all the countries of the world. So, the majority of the mainstream experts are in fact propagandists of the Empire, not independent and even less scholars.

3. The projections of American imperial past on China's foreign policy

Moreover, the article is full of projections of American past and present behaviours upon its main foes, especially the one who has the best chances to contest American leadership: China. China wants to dominate the world, i.e., it wants to replace the US as the dominant power, by using the same imperial strategy: expansion based upon military and economic means (e.g., sanctions), intimidations, verbal aggressions, cheating, hiding the real motives, etc. Here are just a few examples.

First, Ms. Economy complains that China is asserting sovereignty over long-contested territories such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. She also mentions Xinxiang. She forgets (or does she?) that these territories are part of China by international law, including Taiwan.

Second, Ms Economy seems to be outraged by the fact that China has created and militarized seven artificial islands in the China Sea and deploys there an increasingly powerful navy. Even if we add the Chinese military base in Djibouti, this development of China's military bases is dwarfed by the 750 military bases the US has built all over the world, including in China's vicinity. The problem is that Chinese experts have a better knowledge of history than their American colleagues. In 1941 President F.D. Roosevelt told Japan to retreat from the Asian continent when the US understood that Japan was becoming a serious obstacle to its national interests in Asia. Japan answered: no way. So, the US confiscated Japanese assets in the US and implemented a strict embargo on Japan's import of petrol through the China Sea. It was a clear indication of how the US would use the freedom of navigation policy should China become a serious obstacle to the US interests in Asia. China's clear message to the US: message received; we act accordingly!

Third, Ms Economy is negatively impressed by what she calls 'the cracking down of China's world-class technology sector'. Amazing, coming from someone who is a strong defender of market economy. What China is doing towards these enterprises (as well as to other enterprises in similar situations) is to assure that no dominant position would emerge in the 'Chinese market'. Of course, the US have promoted these dominant positions within its economy for a long time, in blatant contradiction with one of the major 'laws' of the market: competition is necessary for the good functioning of the market, as it stimulates innovation and reduces the costs of production to the advantage of consumers. It is well known that these giant enterprises are a good asset for the US foreign policy and its dominant position in the world. But then the question is: is the US still a market economy or has it evolved towards a capitalist economy where competition and transparency (the other major 'law' of market economy) are seriously diminished? (I have developed this point in my 2022 book, *America and the China Threat. From the End of History to the End of Empire*, Clarity Press, Atlanta, US).

Finally, Ms. Economy complains that ‘despite being 900 miles away from the Arctic Circle, China has provided training and financial support for thousands of Chinese researchers on Arctic-related topics, supported joint research and exploration with Arctic countries, built a fleet of state-of-the-art icebreakers, and funded research stations in several Arctic countries.’ With no surprise she has nothing to say about Washington building several hundreds of military bases around China despite being 6928 miles from Beijing.

4. Misunderstanding China’s foreign policy, considering China’s achievements as assets for its aggressive foreign policy

Certainly, at the beginning of her article she acknowledges the improvements of China’s power resources, but she uses the rest of the article by negatively relating these improvements to China’s aggressive foreign policy. The weakness of Ms. Economy’s analysis makes it easy to discover what is the real motive of the aggressive hostility towards today’s China: China wants to radically transform the international order the US made. China wants to ‘supersede the US as the dominant force in the Asia-Pacific, the BRI is used as a conduit through which China can transmit its political and cultural values and is presented as a developmental model as one worth emulating’.

This is a blatant misunderstanding of China’s foreign policy aims, a good example of projections onto China of the traditional US behaviour in the international system. Chinese leaders and Chinese people are certainly very proud of their country, but they very well know that their model cannot be transplanted abroad. China has some specific characteristics that no other country possesses, a population of more than 1400 million people, a specific culture oriented more towards practical endeavours, aimed at assuring harmony at home and abroad, and at providing its citizens with the material goods necessary for having ‘a good life’ (as per the Confucian political philosophy), than towards acting on the basis of abstract ideological values. China has no will to transform the rest of the world according to its image, as the US has done, and is still trying to do today (see the conference of democracies hosted online by President Biden). China does not care how you organize your country, provided that you respect China in the international arena. It just wants to make trade, investments and economic exchanges with other countries based upon ‘win-win’ deals. It does not impose

them, neither does it impose political and economic re-structuring to transform those countries to its image, as the US and the West have done for decades with catastrophic consequences for the countries concerned in Latin America and Africa. A new form of colonialism.

But there is a more fundamental reason explaining why China does not want to replace the US as a world hegemon: China has taken stock of the reasons explaining the fall of the Soviet Union and of the decline of America. For the latter, it is its over-stretching all over the world and the consequent unbelievable amount of money spent on the ‘security state apparatus’ (military, intelligence, surveillance) that clearly today is not enough to maintain its dominant role, given the changes in the distribution of power resources in the world. Moreover, this policy has subtracted the investments needed to improve the US infrastructure and social policies. These are the reasons that explain the decline of US power both at home and abroad. Clearly, the establishment bears the responsibility for the failure of its policies both at home and abroad. Ms. Economy explains this policy by the moral imperative to assume responsibility for delivering to the world the public goods of peace and prosperity. Clearly, mission impossible! The real motive was to realize the interests of the establishment and not of the American people. China is not fool enough to be mired into such a trap! China’s history shows, and today Chinese leadership strategy (both at home and abroad) shows that China’s policies are not oriented by such blatant contradictions, but by the goal of providing its people with ‘a good life’ and the rest of the world with common, cooperative endeavours exemplified by the ‘win-win’ projects in hard and soft infrastructures.

Ms Economy complains that China ‘moves away from greater economic freedom and opening and increasing state control over the economy. Clearly, she has not understood the nature of China’s socio-political-economic system, which is not a feature typical of ‘Communist China’, but has been, *mutatis mutandis*, the main feature of China’s governance from the Empire up to today: politics dominates the economy and not the reverse, as in the West. This pattern is clearly here to stay for a long time. The Chinese people seems to be at ease with this pattern. Freedom, democracy and human rights are great, when they are implemented. But you cannot eat them, they cannot guarantee that they can provide the material means necessary for running ‘a good life’. After twenty years in Afghanistan (and

elsewhere) the US has not been able to implement any of those ‘Western values’. The majority of the Afghan people needs infrastructure, both physical (modern railway and roads, power plants, etc.) and soft (education, health, etc.) in order to develop the country and escape from poverty. China has already delivered some of these and is going to deliver more. The US cannot do much against that. Certainly, Ms Economy takes a lot of time analysing China’s weaknesses: e.g., problems with the implementation of the BRI, international isolation, backlash of what she qualifies as China’s aggressive foreign policy. Notwithstanding, hard data shows that the US is declining, while China is rising, as a recent document published by a think tank set up by the *Council on Foreign Affairs* has recognized (Council on Foreign Relations. *Independent Task Force for the evaluation of the implications of the BRI for the U.S., 79th Report. 2021*).

5. Misunderstanding the origin and the role of the Belt and Road Initiative within China’s foreign policy strategy

Ms Economy mentions the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as one that proves that everything China does is the consequence of the will and choice of Xi Jinping. Nothing is more wrong. I have shown elsewhere (Urio 2022) that the BRI is the logical consequence of China’s strategy defined by Zhu Enlai already in 1963: modernize China in four strategic domains: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence. Xi has not defined this strategy, he simply does what is necessary for realizing it thus making the China Dream come true. Moreover, in doing so, Xi has not invented anything really new. He acts within the strategy defined by Zhu Enlai in 1963 and followed since then by all the Chinese leaders: restore China as a world power to avoid the humiliations and the bullying from foreign powers (European, American and Japanese). These leaders, and Xi is no exception, act towards this goal by adapting the strategy to the reality of the environment (both national and international) by taking advantage of the changes that inevitably evolve in the course of history. China has done this without behaving as the West has done since at least the discovery of the Americas: the defeat of the targeted countries by all necessary means, including military menace and, whenever necessary, military aggressions. And this is the main reason that explains the flaws of American mainstream analyses of China’s foreign policy. This brings us to the next point.

6. The misuse of historical analysis: ignoring the wrongdoings of US foreign policy

As suggested above, US mainstream experts have some serious problems with history. Blatant, outspoken lies are easy to debunk. Lies ‘by omission’, that are by definition absent from the narrative, are more insidious as the readers are not always in a position to identify them, and to give to the narrative its actual meaning. Now, lies by omission abound in mainstream analyses of China’s foreign policy, especially when they compare it with the US one. Ms. Economy’s article is no exception. Clearly Ms. Economy, together with the majority of mainstream experts, has a strange way of taking into account history. They pick the events that better suit the defence of the US as the leader of the liberal-rule-based international order. They forget the wrongdoings perpetrated by the American leadership since the beginning of the US Republic: genocide of the ‘savage’ Native Indians, slavery of the Negroes over more than 2 centuries, plus a century of apartheid with ‘American characteristics’, more than 300 military interventions abroad of which only 11 after formal declaration of war, numerous meddling into other countries’ elections, overt and covert wars (many of them illegal), illegal sanctions on countries and enterprises that do not comply with US interests, numerous regime changes, support of subversive and separatist national actors favourable to the US and hostile to their own government (e.g. in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, and other East-Asian countries such as Thailand), violation of international laws, support to dictatorships and replacement of democratically elected politicians with dictators, war crimes and crimes against humanity, proclamation of human rights while persecuting Julian Assange and other whistle-blowers for having made public US war crimes and crimes against humanity. Impressive. Each time the US has been confronted with trade-offs between its proclaimed values and its interests, it has almost always opted in favour of its national interests, or more precisely the interests of its establishment. These are the main reasons that explain the decline of the American Empire and the increasing hostility that its behaviour has produced all over the world. Democracy must be implemented both at home and abroad. US democracy at home does not look like an exceptional achievement, and US behaviour abroad is certainly a blatant contradiction to its proclaimed values of democracy and human rights.

7. The incapacity to conceive another world and another US foreign policy

The analyses presented in articles such as Ms. Economy's article, show that the US establishment and its advisers are not ready to change the US strategy in the international system where the formidable changes that have occurred since at least the fall of the Soviet Union should have suggested a different strategy to the US government. The problem is that the ideology upon which American strategy and behaviours are based, took form right at the beginning of the US Republic and has not changed since. It has developed not only as a very appealing source motivating the behaviour of the American establishment, but has also been so strong that over time it has become a powerful weapon of mass destruction: it has destroyed the capacity of the US establishment and of its advisers to conceive of another world freed of the US dominant and leading role. At the end, the major victims of this way of conceiving the world are not only the people of the rest of the world who have suffered immensely from the American aggressions, but above all the American people, a great people, that deserved to be better served by its establishment. The goal of State's good governance should be to serve its people not the capitalistic market and its elite (a mere 1% of the total population).

This is not to say, as has happened in the US in the XIX Century, when several voices were raised to criticise the arrogant posture of the Manifest destiny, that also today many Americans do not strongly criticize the foreign policy of their government. Criticism of US foreign policy in the US comes from both the Left and the traditional (mainly, libertarian) Right. Whereas the former can be easily dismissed by 'mainstream experts' as anti-American (read: anti-establishment), it is more difficult to dismiss the latter on the same ground. In fact, in addition to criticism coming from the Left, some of the most devastating criticisms of US foreign policy come from the traditional Right. See for example the excellent analysis of the historical causes of the Afghanistan debacle by Jacob G. Hornberger, the founder of the *Future of Freedom Foundation* ('The Real Lessons of the Afghanistan Disaster'); as well as the not less excellent analysis of the causes of China's behaviour in international relations by Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute ('Why China Behaves the Way it Does, and What to Do About it'). As someone who has never been involved in politics, by mentioning these articles, I do not want to give the impression of endorsing all the analyses of these two think tanks. Nevertheless, I find it interesting to mention that both articles refer the readers to the

aggressive US foreign policy towards Muslim countries and the rest of the world as the major cause explaining the resentment of large parts of the world towards the US foreign policy. No one could reasonably accuse Hornberger and Bandow of being anti-Americans, unless one is ready to fall into ridicule. Which we cannot exclude for mainstream experts. As the French says, ridicule has a formidable firewall: it does not kill.

It remains that Hornberger and Bandow are certainly very critical, as are many other Americans, of the aggressive foreign policy of their country. Moreover, they often complain that the US establishment has betrayed the foreign policy as defined by the Founding Fathers (Rockwell quotes the 4 July 1821 speech by President John Quincy Adams). I am sorry to say that I am not so sure. I have shown in my 2022 Clarity book that the fundamental feature of US foreign policy (from which all the rest follows) was there right from the beginning, i.e., the partition between WE and the OTHERS: the Whites civilizational colonizers on the one hand, and on the other the ‘savages’ Native Indians and the ‘inferior race’ of the Negroes. It can be argued that at different times in history the US establishment has tried to reverse this pattern. Unfortunately, history clearly shows that not only it did not succeed in the long term, but that it has even made it worse, by making the US the major threat to peace and global prosperity in the XXI century, as Ms. Economy’s article and today’s American foreign policy towards China (and Russia) very well demonstrate. And so is the main demonstration of my 2022 Clarity Press book *‘America and the China Threat. From the end of history to the end of Empire’*. There, the reader may be interested in finding an in-depth analysis of the historical, ideological and public policy origins and failures of the US foreign policy.