



## Is This the Beginning of a New Cold War between the U.S. and China?

**Dr. LEE Seong-hyon**  
*Director, Center for  
Chinese Studies,  
The Sejong Institute  
(sunnybbsfs@gmail.com)*

Just short of calling it a "Cold War," the United States formally announced the onset of a new Cold War with China, with the public announcement of the "United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China," May 20, 2020 (local time).

The most notable part of this report is the "Challenges to Our Values." This indicates that the nature of the conflict between the U.S. and China is a "value conflict." Instead of "President Xi," the U.S. titled the president of China as "General Secretary Xi," which refers to the "Chinese Communist Party General Secretary." Such transition signifies that the Trump administration has accepted the title related issue raised by China-expert groups in the U.S. It is a formal declaration that China is a communist country. The report also used the word "regime" where it should have been put as "China." This is an expression that U.S. uses to referring countries like North Korea.

The report quoted President Xi Jinping's internal statement in 2013 "Capitalism is bound to die out and socialism is bound to win (资本主义最终消亡、社会主义最终胜利)."<sup>1)</sup> This remark was not released to the public until April 2019. It seems that while China has been advocating for free global trade system, it actually has been going through an "ideological competition" with the West under water for quite a long time. Also China is not only encouraging communism to the world as an alternative for democracy but even claiming that it is a governance system which is "functioning better" than the western democracy.

Moreover, the report noted that the slogan which Xi Jinping is advocating, "Community of Common Destiny for Mankind (人類命運共同體)," is actually being used to promote communist-led "ideological conformity," and that this has been manipulated to instill Chinese influence not only domestically but also abroad.

1) Original text of Xi Jinping's statement in 2013: "资本主义最终消亡、社会主义最终胜利" Source "关于坚持和发展中国特色社会主义的几个问题" 求是, March 31, 2019.

When President Trump visited China in November 2017, he was criticized for being “the first U.S. President who did not raised the human rights issue” as he never once mentioned human rights problem. While on the contrary, this paper pointed out China’s human rights issues, oppression of ethnic minorities, and persecution of religion by referring Xinjiang, Hong Kong and others.

Whether or not decoupling has already arrived on the economic frontline is controversial, but the Deputy National Security Advisor of the White House National Security Committee (NSC), Matt Pottinger, stated that decoupling “has been going for quite some time.” He used the example of “The Great Firewall of China” and argued that such action includes not only technological disagreements such as China’s restriction on Western internet sites, but also oppression of religion and ethnic minorities. He continued that it shows that universal values of humanity is not respected in China, and that it is in fact China who first began decoupling.

Some people view that the purpose of this document is to pull up President Trump’s approval ratings ahead of the upcoming presidential election by using anti-Chinese sentiment that is growing nowadays among American citizens. There is also an expectation that the U.S.-China relationship may return to “normal track” if the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, is elected. Even so, that is premature optimism.

Even with Biden’s victory in the election, conflicts between the U.S. and China will not be resolved easily. Perhaps the clash could further spread to human rights issues and more. Joe Biden, the current Democratic presidential candidate, called Xi Jinping a “thug” concerning the human rights problem. President Xi is also known to tell Henry Kissinger, who visited Beijing at the end of last year, that he would “dealing with Trump rather than the Democratic Party who would not discuss on the key trade issues but keep going on the human rights problems.”

This report is also a collection of opinions against China of several factions within the U.S. government. △ The moderates in the government have converged into hardliners, and △ within the White House, “hardliners for the election,” who used “China bashing” for winning the election, have changed into “ideological hardliners,” who views the Chinese Communist Party intrinsically discrepant to the American values and intends to foil the emergence of China. China’s behavior in the COVID-19 crisis provided a decisive opportunity for the integration of several factions.

The report stated in the conclusion that this document is the “fundamental reevaluation” of the U.S. of China.

Unlike the hot war with firing of weapons, the Cold War (冷戰) between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (美蘇) did not involve direct military engagement between the two. However, these two forces confronted each other in diverse aspects, including military alliance, nuclear weaponry, assassination, arms race, intelligence warfare, proxy wars, media warfare, and space race with advanced technology like Sputnik.

The conventional paradigm of South Korea's view of the U.S.-China relations was that the situation is different compared to the past Cold War period, because the U.S. and China are economically interdependent and have shown no conflict on ideological values. Yet with this report, the paradigm is no longer valid. In the end, the history will remember this report as another "X Article," which signaled onset of the New U.S.-China Cold War.

South Korea may feel the urge to deny the meaning of this report signed by President Trump or belittle its importance. This is the operation coming from the victim mentality who has been infringed and coerced by surrounding powers for thousands of years. It is because the new Cold War between the U.S. and China could be the advent of geopolitical "dark age" for South Korea. Nevertheless, the best strategy is to face the reality, examine all various policy options for the rough future (e.g., hedging between the U.S. and China, diversification of the value chain, seeking Korea's self-reliant survival etc.), and prepare for South Korea's countermeasures to overcome each possible worsening scenarios. ❖

*※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

*※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*