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The New Cold War on China

UNDERSTANDING CHINA PT.5/5

Image: *Joint U.S. Trilateral Naval Exerccise, PACOM.*



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The 2022 US National Security Strategy states that “the post-Cold War era is definitely over and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next.”

It goes on to identify that “the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”

China’s threat to the US’ world order is evident in two areas →

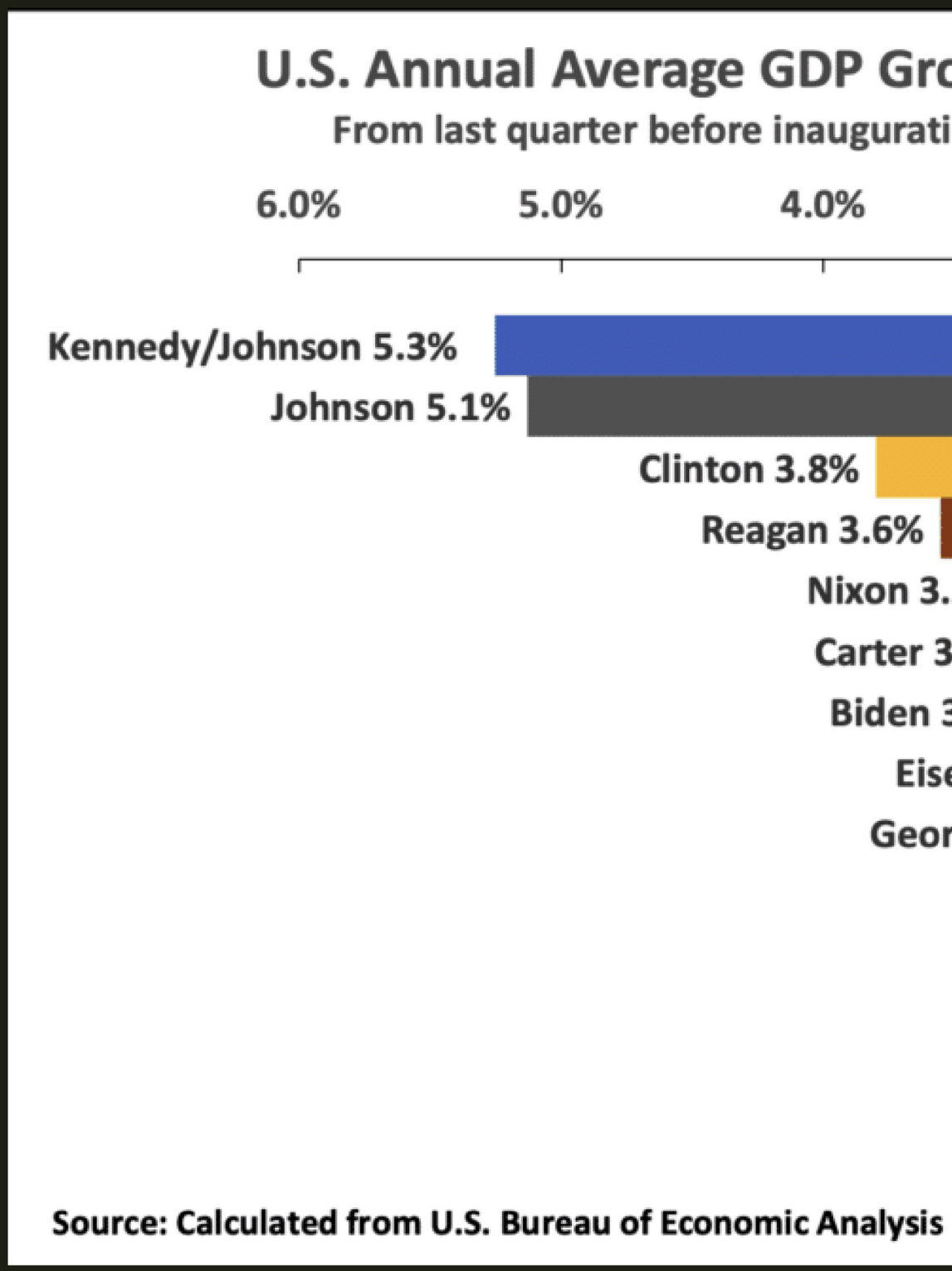
Source: *The White House, National Security Strategy (2022).*

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1. Economic Strength

From 2019 to 2024, the Chinese economy grew by 26.2%, while the US economy grew by 12.5%. China is outcompeting the US in 57 of the 64 most critical technologies. It leads the world in many industries of the future, including renewable energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and nuclear fusion.

The US economy is getting progressively weaker. Starting with the 1961 Kennedy administration, the US annual average GDP growth has remained the same or fallen for each successive administration. In 2008, the US economy imploded from the Great Financial Crisis, while China was able to maintain double-digit growth rates.

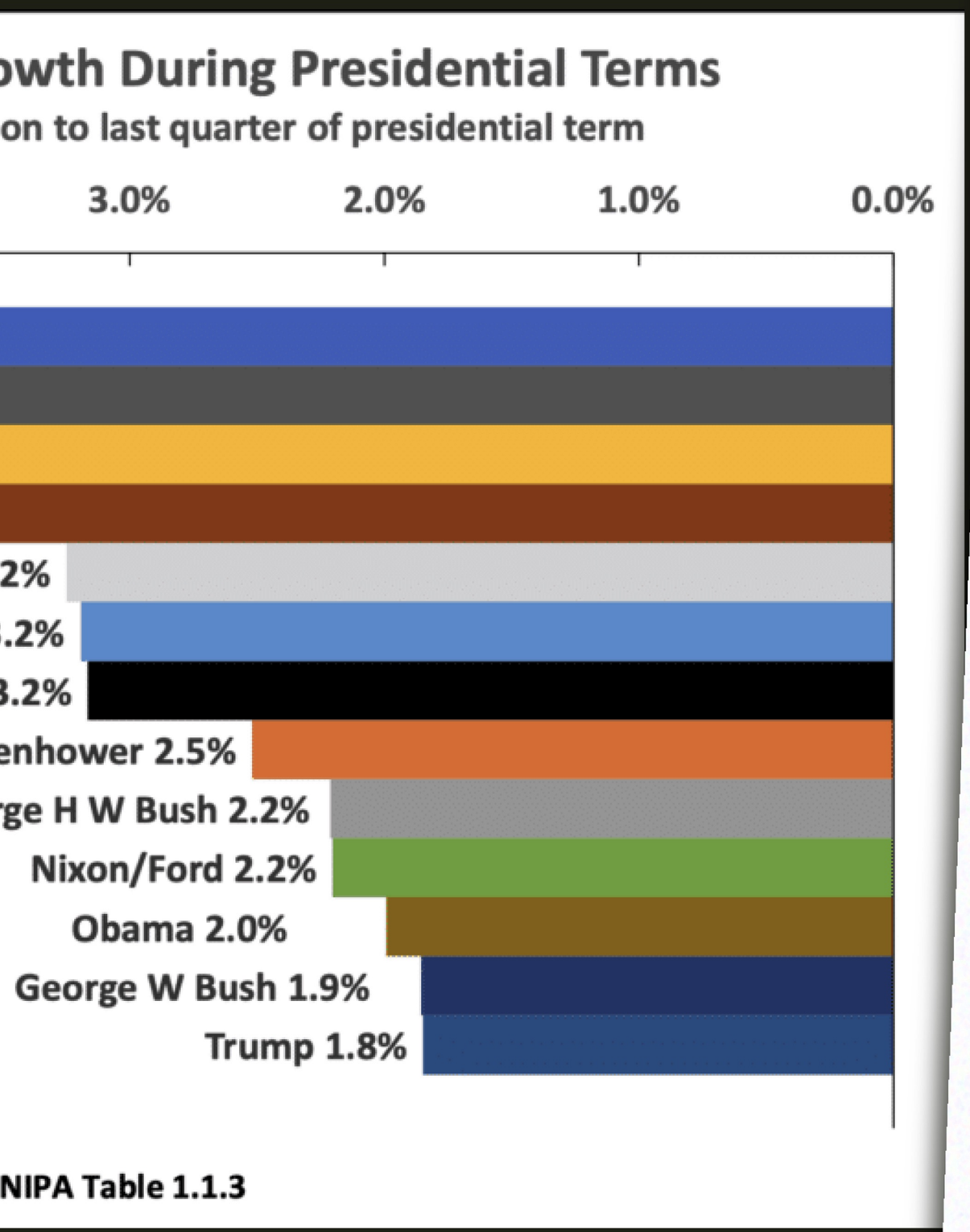


Sources: *Ross, Monthly Review (2025); Australian Strategy Policy Institute, Critical Technology Tracker (2025); Prashad, Tricontinental (2025); Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024).*

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2. Political Vision

Unlike other countries who experienced rapid economic development in the post-WWII era (e.g. Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea), the PRC is not economically or militarily subordinated to the US. This has allowed it to challenge the US' "rules-based" order with its own UN-centric vision.



↳ **US' Rules-Based Order:** The US' so-called "rules-based" order is designed to maintain the US empire. Its key institutions include NATO, the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, as well as the 900+ global US military bases and US dollar hegemony. It views sovereignty as conditional on respecting "human rights," not as an absolute right under international law.

↳ **China's UN-Centric Vision:** China advocates for a UN-based order premised on mutual respect for international law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression and non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

Sources: *Ross, Monthly Review (2025); Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review (2021), Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024).*

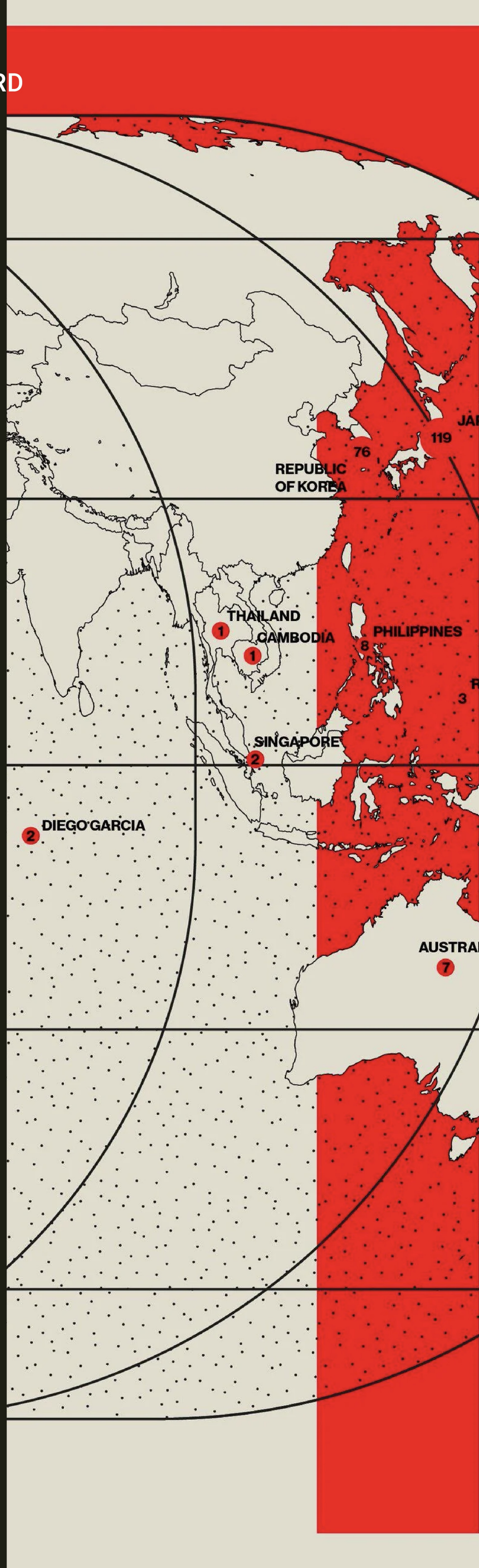
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New Cold War

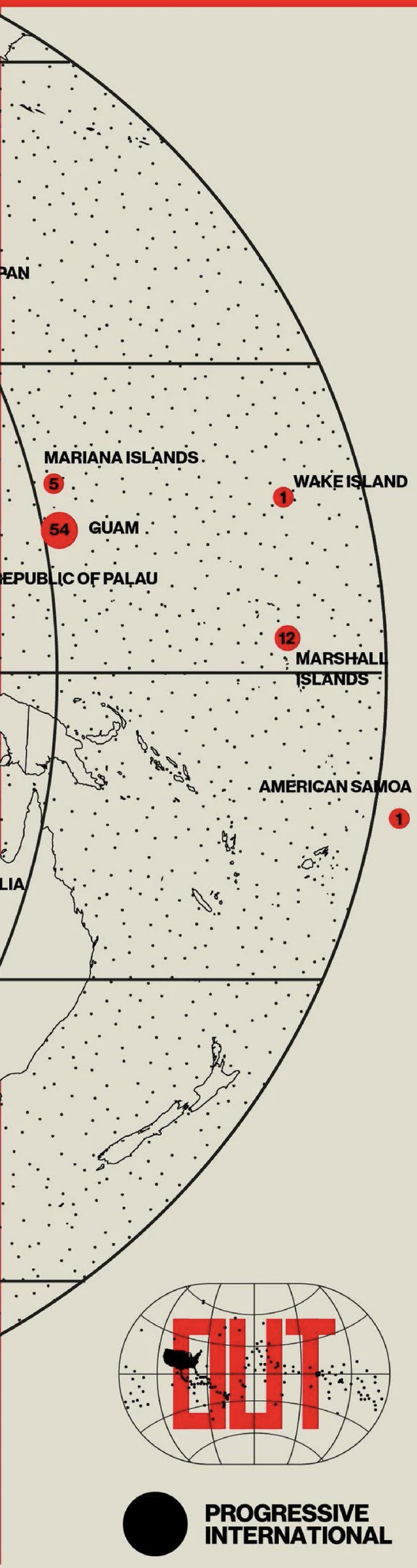
China's political-economic ascendance poses an intolerable "threat" to the US ruling class. As Speaker of the House Mike Johnson says, "communist China is America's largest geopolitical foe" and "enemy."

To maintain its dying empire, the US and its allies are waging a New Cold War on China that aims to overthrow the Communist Party of China (CPC), reverse the PRC's development, and permanently bind it to the US imperial "rules-based" order.

The US-led New Cold War strategy is based on **military encirclement and economic constrainment in the Indo-Pacific region →**



Sources: *Enfu & Jing, Monthly Review (2024); Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review (2021).*
Image: *Progressive International.*



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The Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific has evolved from a geographic region marking the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans to the strategic theatre of the New Cold War on China. This "super-region" is "the world's center of gravity," containing:

- 65% of the world's ocean, 25% of the world's land, over half of the world's population, and 58% of global youth
- 66% of the global growth in GDP and 60% of global GDP
- The world's **three largest economies** (US*, China, Japan) and **six of the world's fastest growing economies** (India, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Nepal, Philippines)

*The US claims it is an Indo-Pacific power, but no part of the contiguous US is in the region. Only its colonial territories are in the Indo-Pacific, e.g. Hawai'i and American Samoa.

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Sources: *Enfu & Jing, Monthly Review (2024); Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019); Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024).*

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Trump was the first US president to institutionalise the US' focus on the Indo-Pacific, renaming the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) to the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and publishing the first Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report.

Sources: *Enfu & Jing, Monthly Review (2024); Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019); Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024).* ***Image:*** *A map of the geographic combatant area overseen by the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command*

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Military Encirclement

The US is implementing an "anaconda stratagem" to constrain the PRC's sovereignty and prepare for war. This includes:

1. **Military Build-Up:** The US has 400 military bases and around 375,000 command personnel in the Indo-Pacific, 80,000 of whom are stationed in Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Since 2011, the US has added 12 additional base sites in Australia and the Philippines.

   The US Army is also training troops in Hawai'i for a potential war with China, swapping the "desert-sand-coloured fatigues" used in Afghanistan and Iraq for the "jungle fatigues and face paint" suited to the Chinese mainland.

2. **Strategic Partnerships:** The US has "defense" pacts with 5 of the 40 countries in the Indo-Pacific – Australia, Japan, Philippines, the ROK, Thailand – and is seeking new defense partnership with countries like India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

   The US is actively brokering new military alliances. For example, the trilateral security partnership between Australia-UK-US (AUKUS), which will equip Australia with nuclear-powered* submarines, and a trilateral security cooperation with Japan and the ROK, the latter having excused Japan from paying reparations for its colonial and fascist war crimes.

*Nuclear-powered submarines are not the same thing as nuclear-armed submarines, the former is powered by a nuclear reactor, while the latter carries nuclear missiles. However, nuclear-powered submarines are generally viewed as the first step towards nuclear-armed submarines.

Sources: *Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review (2021); Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024); Cooper, The New York Times (2024). Tricontinental, The New Cold War is Sending Tremors through Northeast Asia (2024).*

3. **Offensive Deployments:** In April 2024, the US military deployed Typhon, an intermediate-range land-based missile system capable of carrying both nuclear and non-nuclear payloads, to northern Luzon, Philippines. At this location, Typhon's Tomahawk cruise missiles can strike eastern China.

   This was the first time the US deployed this kind of offensive missile system since its 2019 unilateral withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia.

Source: *Bellamy Foster & Clark, Monthly Review (2024).* ***Image:*** *Multinational drills in Indonesia. USARPAC.*

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Economic Constrainment

The US is waging a multi-pronged economic offensive on the PRC, including:

1. **Trade War:** Trump introduced tariffs on Chinese goods during his first term, most of which were kept in place by Biden. In May, Trump placed a 34% tariff on all Chinese goods, which proceeded to increase to 145% before China and the US agreed to a 90-day tariff reduction.

2. **Sanctions:** The US has placed 1,300 Chinese entities, including enterprises and universities, on sanction lists. The sanctions impact a wide range of sectors, like semiconductor production, AI, biomedicine, and education.

3. **Tech Blockade:** In 2022, the Biden Administration passed the CHIPS and Science Act, which prohibited companies receiving federal aid from increasing advanced chip production in China. In December 2025, Biden restricted the export of high-bandwidth chips to China to try to slow China's AI and chipmaking capacity.

Source: *Wiseman & Rugaber, AP (2024); Enfu & Jing, Monthly Review (2024); Prashad, Tricontinental (2025).*
Image: *Getty Images*



Although based on military and economic manoeuvres, what China faces is a “hybrid war.” This includes cultural aggression (e.g. Trump calling COVID-19 the “China virus”) and diplomatic belligerence (e.g. then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visiting Taiwan in 2022).

This is part 5 of 5 of our series dedicated to understanding China.

As eco-socialist organisers in the imperial core, it is our duty to stop the New Cold War on China and prevent a thermonuclear third world war. We must build a new world order based on peace, justice, cooperation, and sustainability.

Image: *Sheyang Farmers Painting Institute (Jiangsu, China), part of the ‘farmers painting’ project, 2017. Tricontinental.*