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The Washington Post's Newest Strategy for Challenging China



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The *Washington Post's* oped writers on national security are mostly in agreement on the importance of challenging and even confronting China. Writers such as David Ignatius, Marc Thiessen, and particularly Josh Rogin favor greater defense spending and Indo-Pacific deployments to deal with the problem of China. They give little attention to the possibility of dealing with the problem diplomatically. Now the *Post* has an additional writer—Max Boot—with a new idea for expanding U.S. influence and power at China's expense. Boot's solution is to give greater support to India, particularly in view of that country's emergence last month as having the world's largest population.

Boot, a conservative writer who believes in the United States as the world's policeman, argues that India's new demographic status, which makes it the first country in recorded

history to overtake China in population, will make it “less likely that the 21st century will be ‘China’s century.’” As a result, Boot believes that India’s potential to “check China’s power” has never been greater, and implies that India would be a natural ally for the United States. A recent article in “Foreign Affairs” similarly argued that India’s “population achievement” suggests that it is the only Asian country with the “natural capacity” to balance China.

Instead of exploring policies that enable the United States to find ways to get along with China, too many politicians and pundits, like Boot, believe the only answer is in the pursuit of confrontation. The idea that India can be our ally against China seems far-fetched, given China’s many strengths, particularly in its economic and military advantages vis-a-vis India. China is the world’s number one manufacturing nation, having replaced the United States in that role, and it is currently manufactures more than the United States, Germany, and Japan combined. China is number two in defense spending, and its \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative gives it influence and power around the globe without any investment in the projection of power, which is central to the costly U.S. presence in the Third World and elsewhere.

Writers such as Fareed Zakaria have been bullish regarding India’s place in the global community, but their optimism is undermined by India’s poor political and economic performance over the past two decades. China’s economy is five times the size of India’s, and China’s per capita output is \$13,000 compared to India’s \$2,500. There are fewer women in the Indian work force currently than there were 20 years ago, and on a percentage basis fewer Indian women than Saudi women in the work force, which is stunning. India’s sanitation situation is abominable, which contributes to high infant mortality and decreased life expectancy. India has a sizable Muslim minority, which contributes to significant political tension, while China’s Han population represents nearly 95% of its total population. Unlike China, India has invested insufficiently in education and health services, and it is woefully behind in trying to create the 9 million new jobs annually that are necessary in non-agricultural areas to keep up with its huge population growth. Governance is uneven throughout the country, and new infrastructure is insufficient. There is no plan apparent for addressing the stagnant wages and the dual crises of unemployment and underemployment. Many jobs have been lost to the factories of Vietnam and Bangladesh. Unlike China, India has not tackled poverty in an institutional way, and as a result more than one-third of Indian children are malnourished. India lags behind China in all these areas.

The United States may favor recruiting India as an ally against China, but this is not a game that New Delhi has ever wanted to play. India is not willing to assist Ukraine or to support sanctions against Russia because it relies on large purchases of Russian energy at favorable prices as well as on Russia for more than half of its imports of sophisticated military weaponry. India is wary about China’s efforts to gain greater influence in the Indo-Pacific region, but does not want to be part of a U.S. strategy that points to an Asian Cold War. India

may be a member of the Quad that includes Australia, Japan, and the United States, but it wants to play all sides in the global community. As a result, India is an active member of BRICs, which includes Brazil, Russia, and China.

Finally, India can never take its eyes off its disputes with Pakistan and the territory of Kashmir, which have led to five wars between the two of them since the British withdrawal from South Asia in 1947. The Indian-Pakistani situation is particularly dangerous because both are nuclear powers, and neither is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The most recent war between the two of them in 1999 introduced the risk of a possible use of nuclear weapons, before the United States intervened diplomatically.

It's time to end the Cold War with China that is marked by a trade and tariff war; excessive militarization of the Indo-Pacific region; and an information war that finds the United States and China gratuitously demonizing each other. Last year, the day after Rep. Nancy Pelosi met with senior Taiwanese officials, China fired DF-15 ballistic missiles into the waters around Taiwan, and then sent nuclear-capable H-6 heavy bombers across the median line in the Taiwan Strait. For its part, the United States responded with the deployment of the USS *Ronald Reagan* and its carrier task force.

For the Biden administration, breaking the gordian knot between the two sides will require ignoring the Chicken Hawks on Capitol Hill and in the mainstream media, particularly Bret Stephens of the *New York Times* who ludicrously proposes that the official U.S. visits to Taiwan should become “so routine that Beijing forgets to protest.” Fat chance!

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