

Belt and Road Initiative and future peacebuilding in the Middle East

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Abstract:

Withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan raises debates on the requiem of peacebuilding among scholars in the post-conflict reconstruction field. Local political elites and beneficiaries are much involved in security and economic interests. Though foreign interveners want to use bottom-up methods, local elites will hamper them if peacebuilding processes contradict their interests.

This paper examines the effectiveness of peacebuilding from role conception, role-playing, and role conflict between foreign interveners(China and the US), especially on foreign interveners' strategies. Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) may be a good topic to analyze the political and economic aspects and their relation with those post-conflict countries. This paper will focus on China's growing role in the Middle East under its BRI. Then, it will discuss the US-China competition and its strategies. Finally, it will discuss the implications for the Middle East.

Keywords: peacebuilding, Iraq, Afghanistan, Belt and Road Initiative, US-China competition, Middle East

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; US-China competition; Biden-Xi talks; peacebuilding; Middle East

1. Introduction

Withdrawing the US troops from Afghanistan raises debates on the requiem of peacebuilding among scholars in post-conflict reconstruction. The future feasibility of so-called "liberal peacebuilding" is also in question. For example, as Jorg Kustermans(2021) claimed, western peacebuilding is not based on a "bottom-up" method but on liberal ideology. Local political elites and beneficiaries are much involved in security and economic interests. Though foreign interveners want to use bottom-up methods, local elites will hamper them if peacebuilding processes

contradict their interests. Thus, nationalism, corruption, oligarchy, autocracy, and even economic imperialism are the typical results(2021, 3).

This paper examines the effectiveness of peacebuilding from role conception and role-playing of foreign interveners(China and the US). Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) may be a good topic to analyze the political and economic aspects and their relation with those post-conflict countries. Under the BRI, China has a considerable number of projects in various Middle East countries. China has become the biggest importer of crude, with almost half of it coming from the Middle East, and emerged as the region's largest trading partner over the last few years(Vohra 2022).

However, with the outbreak of the Russian invasion, western countries seem to unite as in the Cold War, and the competition between democracies and autocracies is much more evident. Therefore, it is vital to examine how the leaders from the US and China think of the recent and future world order. Or will a new Cold War be in the world?

Examining what the leaders want in their decision-making process is always challenging because of the lack of first-hand materials. Thus, analyzing their official talks and document as narrative analyzers do is a way for us to deduce their priorities. President Biden and Xi Jinping met virtually three times in 2021 and 2022 before and after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. These talks are good objectives for us to distinguish whether they have different discourses through context analysis. This paper will check narratives in the meetings. After analyzing leaders' narratives, it will analyze the implication to countries in the Middle East and Taiwan, and finally, with some suggestions.

Discourse analysis is used in many disciplines, including sociology, political science, philosophy, and international relations, and it is often linked with the constructivist and critical approaches to international relations. Although international relations scholars started to adopt the discourse analysis method in the 1980s, it became more mainstream in the next two decades (Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili 2019). Discourse analysis is an engagement with meaning and the linguistic and communicative processes through which social reality is constructed. Discourse can therefore be defined as a space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, transformed, and, accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality (Hölscheiter 2013). This paper uses discourse analysis to discover the changing positions of President Biden and Xi.

2. China's growing role in the middle east

China's intention to enhance its role in the Middle East is obvious. Some said that China had transformed its traditional role conception, "wary of getting embroiled in this chaotic and dangerous graveyard burying empires" to an "all-in" policy (Vohra 2022). This paper focuses primarily on those post-conflict states, especially Iraq and Afghanistan. It might be an alternative route compared to Turkey's Middle Corridor Plan. However, it has much more difficulties with the route through Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq because both countries are under reconstruction and peacebuilding processes and are eager for economic well-being instead of China's political ideas. Whether China has an actual intention or just a "plan," as it sometimes did, is a question. It is also important not to dismiss that the final aim for Xi is the "Chinese Dream," which is to establish China as a world superpower and upend the US' predominance in the Middle East and as an area under Beijing's influence. It concerns not only with securing its energy needs or growing its businesses but also with advertising its political ideology (Vohra 2022). That is: the authoritarian way might be a better option than the democratic way for the Middle East, which could be welcomed by some countries and ignore the abuse of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Moreover, the destination is to challenge the US hegemony with discourses of BRI's "five connections" (五通) and "joint contribution" (共建).

BRI is designed to continue the expansion of China's economic opportunities in Iraq. In 2015, it was believed that more than 10,000 Chinese workers were in Iraq participating in the reconstruction of the country. Xi announced the Health Silk Road in 2016 during his visit to Uzbekistan and advocated for deeper collaboration in health and medicine with the BRI countries. For the Digital Silk Road, in China's view, while the pandemic-related social distancing and large-scale lockdowns prevented free physical movement, most of the BRI countries need improvement in digital technology and infrastructure support. (Hoh 2021, 45).

In 2019, oil imports from Iraq accounted for 10 percent of China's total imports. China saw an opportunity to construct Iraq's electric-power plants, roads, bridges, housing, and telecommunications infrastructure (Hoh 2021, 36). In August 2019, Wu Haitao, deputy permanent representative of China to the United Nations, stated that China would continue to actively participate in reconstructing Iraq's energy and infrastructure under the framework of the BRI. In 2018, Chinese direct investment in

Iraq had reached \$600 million. Since 2018, more than 30 Chinese companies have been operating in Iraq. They include PetroChina, CNOOC, Oasis Oil Company, Shanghai Electric Power Construction, Huawei, and ZTE Corporation. (Hoh 2021, 37) Also, China has decided to construct 7,000 schools and 90,000 houses in Sadr City, build an airport in Nasiriyah and construct 1,000 healthcare clinics all over the country to pay for Iraqi oil (Vohar 2022).

In Afghanistan, for example, China held two international meetings to discuss the economic and humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan in May 2022. These talks came after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Afghanistan's crisis worsened by a financial aid cutoff and sanctions following the Taliban takeover as US-led troops withdrew. The talks also come amid widespread condemnation of the Taliban's U-turn on allowing girls to attend public high schools (Aljazeera 2022).

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi visited the Afghan capital Kabul to discuss starting work in the mining sector and Afghanistan's possible role in China's BRI. However, on other occasions, the Chinese have pushed the Taliban for assurances that it will not permit operations within its borders by members of China's Turkic Muslim Uyghur minority (Aljazeera 2022). The Taliban has failed to hand over Uyghur fighters as Beijing wanted or even to curtail their activity within the country (Pantucci 2022). Also, though there is a surge of Chinese businessmen going into Afghanistan, growth in direct trade has been limited so far, and China's giant state-owned enterprises are treading carefully. The most obvious link from the BRI would be to build connections between the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Afghanistan, but this would require better relations between Kabul and Islamabad (Pantucci 2022). As the US drone strike that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri showed, China lacks the capabilities to go after its adversaries, and therefore China had previously been able to count on Washington acting as a backstop for problems in Afghanistan, with US forces even launching airstrikes on the Taliban's Uyghur allies as a common enemy (Pantucci 2022).

Also, in recent years, lending across BRI has fallen. China is looking for smaller and safer bets in BRI countries, and Afghanistan does not come to mind as an appealing destination. Even though Afghanistan will not turn into a hub of BRI, China could be attempting to draw a stark contrast between the destructive role of the US and with opportunities that China brings if the Taliban does what China wants (Sacks 2021).

China's stand is quite clear. There are four conditions for the Taliban: they take a strict stance against Uyghur militants, form an inclusive government, distance themselves from the US, and moderate their domestic policies. Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated similar conditions at the Cooperation Organization summit in September 2021(Ahmadzai 2022).

Therefore, different opinions showed that the new Islamic State rhetoric targets Chinese imperialism. A recent article published by the Islamic State-Khorasan- the Afghanistan-based Islamic State terrorist movement, called "China dreams" is actually "China's daydream of imperialism" (Ma 2022).

3. What does China want? Comparison with Biden and Xi's narratives before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine

3.1 Before the Russian invasion

3.1.1 Biden-Xi's 2021 Meeting: Groping period

(1) Narrative from Biden

In Biden's narratives, this period is better described as "competition and cooperation simultaneously." During his career, Biden has always stressed the importance of the alliance, democracy, and human rights. This meeting also shows that Biden wanted to continue talks with China but reiterated fair trade and a free and open Indo-Pacific region. He did not want to escalate the conflict with China because of Taiwan. Therefore, he committed again to the "One-China policy" and tried establishing some "guardrails."

During the meeting, Biden hoped to dialogue with Xi candidly and straightforwardly. He underscored the importance of "value," which is "together with our allies and partners, ensure the rules of the road for the 21st century advance an international system that is free, open, and fair". Biden also raised concerns about the "PRC's practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.". He stressed "the need to protect American workers and industries from the PRC's unfair trade and economic practices.". He also discussed "the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific." As for the Taiwan issue, he underscored that the "US remains committed to the "one China" policy, guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances and that the United States strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (White House, 2021a).

However, it is vital to manage strategic risks. Biden noted, "the need for common-sense guardrails to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict and to keep lines of communication open." Also, he proposed several issues that US and China can cooperate on, including climate change, energy, and regional security(White House, 2021a).

According to the White House's news release, it is much clearer in several aspects: First, it seems that there was no significant difference from past dialogues. However, the US wanted to "make clear our intentions and priority to avoid misunderstanding." That is why the guardrail is essential. Second, it is not related to Taiwan: "our policy has been consistent and remains consistent" (White House, 2021b). That is to say, what the US is concerned about is issues such as international rules, human rights, and avoiding conflicts.

(2) Narrative analysis of Xi Jinping

A. Narratives during COVID-19

In their book, T. Colley and C. van Noort's (2022) review of strategic narratives of China and other countries. According to their works, China's strategic narratives during the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 have endured three phases: "China Defends Itself," "China Emphasizes Solidarity," and "China Asserts Its International Leadership" (Colley et al. 2022, 213-214). Among these phases, there is an interesting perspective. When China meets some critics and obstacles, leaders tend to defend first and then offer their kindness and willingness to cooperate with other countries in a multilateral framework. However, after the ongoing crisis calms down, they might insist on multilateralism orally but bilateral in practice.

For example, their responses were as follows when they met strong criticism from other countries, including the US, the UK, and even Germany. "China has always acted in an open, transparent, and responsible manner," "The virus is a common enemy to all mankind," and "China is also a victim ." Besides, they advocated that criticism of mistreating black Africans in Guangzhou is a US plot to undermine China and African countries' friendship(Colley et al. 2022, 215-219). On the contrary, it is clear that under Trump's administration, China was labeled with malevolent intentions toward changing and dominating the international system and world order. Some European countries even suggested reconsidering the "kow-tow" relationship with China to win trade deals(2022: 221).

However, with efficient lockdown and recovery of the economy, China's narrative leads to Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) again. Those keywords in the BRI have reappeared, like "solidarity," "international assistance program," "connectivity," "promote international peace and prosperity," and so on. In order to persuade others under the coming Biden administration, they continue to position US foreign policy as the past and China's as more enlightened in the future(2022: 240). That is: it is a stereotype of US foreign policy behavior, not just Trump. Thus, China is pursuing a "win-win" strategy; on the contrary, the US is leading the zero-sum neoliberal economic order.

Nevertheless, evidence shows that propaganda objectives and not just altruism drove the leading role in global vaccination. As Chinese state media lauded its generosity in donating vaccines, 98% of China's vaccines were sold, in some cases, at higher prices than Western vaccines(Colley et al. 2022, 243-244). It shows the long-lasting Chinese diplomatic strategic culture, bilateral in practice and multilateral in oral. It shows similarities in the process of Biden-Xi's meeting before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as this paper will discuss below.

B. Xi's narratives in the meeting

Xi's Narratives are mainly divided into three parts: dialogue itself, main concerns, and aspects that could be adjusted. First, for the dialogue itself, Xi called Biden an "old friend," showing that he emphasized his relationship with Biden. The Chinese side also admitted that this talk is "candid, in-depth and extensive strategic communication and exchanges on China-US relations and relevant issues of mutual interest" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Secondly, for the major concerns, Xi stressed "Great Powers Relation," "multilateralism," and "exceptionalism." He said, "China and the United States are respectively the biggest developing country and the biggest developed country. Whether they can handle their relationship well bears on the future of the world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021). According to the Chinese version, Xi is also concerned United Nations' role and a world order based on international law. Xi also showed his principle concerns about the Taiwan issue and disagreed with other countries intervening in China's interior affairs in the name of human rights(中華人民共和國外交部, 2021a).

Finally, as for many common challenges, including climate change, the pandemic, and economic recovery, China and the US have great responsibilities to deal with. Xi Jinping asserted that the developing road and strategic intention of China are to "build a better life," and Chinese people love peace and with no intention to become a hegemon. China is on the track of economic globalization, and Xi hopes that the US should not suppress Chinese enterprises in the name of national security(中華人民共和國外交部, 2021a). Such narratives follow the same idea after the outbreak of COVID-19, the doubt about Belt and Road Initiatives(BRI)(Wang, 2018). China still wants to position itself as a protector of global security and aims to compete with the US in a "competition without catastrophe" (鬥而不破) manner, but with some preparation for some kinds of conflict.

In order not to be intervened by the US and to assert its exceptionalism in human rights and economic development modes, China also held good relations with Russia. Interestingly, after meeting with Biden, Xi talked with Russian president Putin. He emphasized that both sides should start more joint activities because some countries intervene in Chinese and Russian interior affairs in the name of democracy and human rights. Both sides opposed "cold-war mentality" and hegemonic behaviors with multilateralism and rules(中華人民共和國外交部, 2021b). Therefore, as mentioned above, China wanted to cooperate with the US at this stage but still insists on "bottom-line thinking" (底線思維).

3.2 After the Russian invasion

Xi faced whether to stand with Putin after the outbreak of the Russian invasion. Xi Jinping claimed that China would decide its position according to what is right and wrong. He urged to respect each state's reasonable security concern, as Russia claimed that Western countries' eastward expansion challenged Russia's bottom line. Xi also slams on "Cold-War mentality," an international system based on respecting the sovereignty and territorial unity centering on UN and international order underpinned by international law(中華人民共和國外交部, 2022a). Actually, China avoided supporting any side at the beginning of the invasion, which can be seen again in Premier Li-Keqiang's talk(中華人民共和國外交部, 2022b).

3.2.1 Biden-Xi's 2022 meeting in march

(1) Narrative from Biden: Realizing and understanding

Biden urged Xi not to stand with Russia in this meeting and warned of "implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia." Both leaders agreed on "maintaining open lines of communication to manage the competition." Biden reiterated that "US policy on Taiwan has not changed, and emphasized that the United States continues to oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo" (White House, 2022a).

Also, senior administration officials have more information in the press call. First, it stressed that this conversation was "direct," "substantive," and "detailed," which were "respect" and "open" in the past. In that meaning, what should be the "bargaining chips" on the table? Taiwan issue seems clear to be the exchange chips offered by China. Because in the press call, we found these words: "President Xi raised Taiwan. President Biden reiterated that the United States remains committed to 'our' one-China policy" (White House, 2022b). The word "our" did not appear in the last meeting, and we can imagine that both sides do not seem to have a common ground on this issue. Besides, the senior administration official also said, "President Biden himself voted for the Taiwan Relations Act...demonstrated rock-solid support for Taiwan and will continue to do so" (White House, 2022b). Answering whether to send wrong signals to Taiwan's independent forces, the official responded with "very longstanding policy," which means that the US is more concerned about whether China would take advantage of the Russian invasion.

However, to save China's face, the US side stressed that "they are not making specific requests of China," instead "laying out an assessment of the situation" and the consequences when China supports Russia. Jake Sullivan showed the same narratives in the Alaska talks. He said, "We do not seek conflict, but we welcome stiff competition and will always stand up for our principles, for our people, and for our friends" (Reuters, 2021).

(2) Narratives from Xi Jinping: Playing Taiwan card

Asked for a clear standpoint on supporting Russia or not by the US, Xi Jinping played the Taiwan card in the meeting. He said,

"...some people in the US have sent a wrong signal to "Taiwan independence" forces. This is very dangerous. Mishandling of the Taiwan question will have a disruptive impact on the bilateral ties. China hopes that the US will give due attention

to this issue. The direct cause for the current situation in the China-US relationship is that some people on the US side have not followed through on the important common understanding reached by the two Presidents and have not acted on President Biden's positive statements. The US has misperceived and miscalculated China's strategic intention." (Foreign Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2022a)

After stating the standpoints on Taiwan, Xi continued with the Ukraine war. Xi reiterated the importance of the UN charter, international law, and peace. He hoped to solve Ukraine's problem with negotiation. However, it looks much more like nothing has been said. Xi claims, "It is up to the doers to undo the knot" (解鈴還須繫鈴人), "mutual respect among great powers," "Giving up Cold-War mentality, confrontation in groups" and "construct balance, effective, sustainable global and regional security architecture" (中華人民共和國外交部, 2022c).

3.2.2 Biden-Xi's 2022 meeting in July

(1) Narratives from Biden: Losing patience

After Xi proposed "Global Security Initiatives" at Boao Forum in May 2022, US' strategic response toward China became clear and without ambiguity. First, Spokesperson Ned Price insisted that the US maintain a "rule-based international system" with partners who respect human rights, sovereignty, and self-determination after Boao Forum. Wendy Sherman criticized Chinese official media for spreading disinformation and conspiracy theory from Russia (Leslie et al., 2022). These responses show that the US lost its patience with the Chinese attitude toward Russia.

President Biden released a talk between him and Xi to show the differences between both and from democracy to the authoritarian regime. We can read the different sights and impressions from both leaders. Xi is more concerned about the "relationship network." For example, Xi stressed that he remembered everything Biden had said to him. On the contrary, Biden shows his Emphasis on democracy. When Xi asked Biden not to criticize China's human rights issues in terms of the US way, Biden reiterated the democratic value and that what he was doing was reestablishing an alliance that the US had before (White House, 2022c). Biden added, "He (Xi Jinping) does not have a 'democratic bone in his body....He thinks that democracy requires consensus. They cannot operate quickly enough in this rapidly changing world" (White House, 2022c). Biden thought that democracy is "born that

way." Many leaders in the world have the same question "how long can 'America is back' persist? Answering his own question, Biden believes that coordination and standing together among democratic states is what authoritarian regimes are afraid of(White House, 2022c). Therefore, for Biden, the alliance's support can strengthen US's effort to counter authoritarian groups. Also, the US has to stand for democratic partners. When asked by media in Japan whether the US would support Taiwan when Beijing invaded, Biden gave a clear "yes" and said, "that is the commitment we made(White House, 2022e), which was seen as turning back on "strategic ambiguity(Wong, 2022).

The resolution in the G7 summit focused on China much more obviously. "Committing to a unified approach to confront China's unfair economic practices: The G7 will release collective, unprecedented language acknowledging the harms caused by the People's Republic of China's (PRC) non-transparent, market-distorting industrial directives" (White House, 2022d). The G7 committed to cooperating on cyber, quantum technology, trade, multilateral framework, human rights, and resilience of democracy.

In July's meeting, both sides returned to the standpoints from the first meeting. However, the Taiwan issue is still a bargaining chip for China. According to the administrative official, Biden and Xi discussed Taiwan in-depth. While Biden reaffirmed the US commitment to its One-China policy and opposed unilateral changes to the status quo by either side and commitment to maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, he also emphasized keeping an open line of communication.

(2)Narratives from Xi: Supporting Russia, insisting bottom line, and pursuing alliances

Xi proposed "Global Security Initiatives" in 2022's Boao Forum, he said,

"that is, to stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and work together to maintain world peace and security; stay committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, uphold non-interference in internal affairs, and respect the independent choices of development paths and social systems made by people in different countries; stay committed to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, reject the Cold War mentality, oppose unilateralism, and say no to group politics and bloc

confrontation; stay committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, uphold the principle of indivisible security, build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, and oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security; stay committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation, support all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of crises, reject double standards, and oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction; stay committed to maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains, and work together on regional disputes and global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, cybersecurity and biosecurity(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022a)

Xi's narrative returns to the discourse in the third stage during COVID-19 and shows the revival of BRI again. He stressed fairness and the bottom line. Facing the discourse of Democracies vs. Authoritarian regimes, China needs to find more friends. Thus, those narratives used in the BRI revived again, such as "we do not mean to ideological confrontation," "weaponizing, politicalizing and instrumentalizing world economy and using sanction will not benefit for people in the world," "ensuring equal rights, rules and opportunities of every country" (中華人民共和國外交部, 2022d; 2022e).

In the phone talk with Biden in July, Xi emphasized the responsibility of China and the US for world peace and security and for promoting global development and prosperity. He claimed to uphold the international system centering on the UN and the international order underpinned by international law. Xi urged to maintain communication at all levels and make good use of existing channels to promote bilateral cooperation, especially in macroeconomic policies, energy, and food security.

However, the Taiwan question is the bottom line for Xi, and his narrative is even stronger. He opposed separatist moves and interference by external forces and would never allow any room for "Taiwan independence" forces in whatever form. "Those who play with fire will perish by it" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

4. Implications for the Middle East and peacebuilding

4.1 Implications of the narratives

Comparing narratives differences between the two leaders in different stages(as

below Sheet), it is evident that both leaders wanted to mitigate tension in the two countries before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even Xi Jinping showed good will to the US with some bottom line. However, China leveraged the US with the Taiwan question once the Russian invasion began. Xi wished to get some compromise and promise from the US on Taiwan in exchange for China's position on Ukraine. Though we can not see detailed discussions on this issue through official documents, we can refer that no consensus on this issue existed. Thus, the US changed its narratives and added “our” One China Policy. It is clear to China that we are different on this issue. China responded with “US misperceived and miscalculated China’s strategic intention.”

At last, because there is no further progress on China’s cooperative attitude toward Western sanctions on Russia, US-China relations seemed on the same track as with the Trump administration. That is: China is the major competitor with the US. However, the most significant difference between Biden and Trump is that Biden cares about alliances, democracy, human rights, and Taiwan. In contrast, Trump seems more “tradeable,” and Taiwan is one of the bargaining chips for interest exchange(Liu 2022). Syrian Kurds and Afghanistan were evidence under the Trump administration. Under the Biden administration, with the prolonged and continuing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US started to adjust its attitude if it could not get enough support from the alliances, especially the energy crisis of European countries in the coming winter. Thus, the US admitted that competition with China and Russia is a decade-long period, and some cooperation, such as climate change and pandemic, is needed. This paper will discuss the 2022 US National Security Strategy in the next part, but Biden-Xi’s talk in July 2022 has shown that trend.

Leaders’ narratives in different stages

Time	Narratives from Biden	Narratives from Xi Jinping	Major concern
Before Russian Invasion	Central discourse: competition but cooperation in several areas. 1.Shared interests and value with alliances: free, open, and fair international system: oppose China's efforts to change existing world order.	Central discourse: stable and healthy China-US relations. 1.Sovereignty: principled position on Taiwan question. 2. National security. 3.Benefits from development. 4.International system centering on UN and international order	Great Powers relations and avoiding strategic risks.

	<p>2.Human rights and democracy. 3.strategic risks exist: communication and guardrail.</p>	<p>underpinned by international law.</p>	
	<p>Secondary discourses 1.“One China Policy,” but the Taiwan question is not this talk's point. 2.How to manage the competition.</p>	<p>Secondary discourses: 1. No fixed democracy. 2.Creating a better life is not equal to being a hegemon. 3.Objection to the “New Cold War” and ideological confrontation.</p>	
After Russian Invasion	<p>Central discourse: Respect China’s decision on reaction toward Russia 1.Consequences to support Russia. 2.Solidarity of alliance. 3.“our” One China Policy</p>	<p>Central discourse: China’s position on Ukraine depends on facts. 1.Taiwan question: US misperceived and miscalculated China’s strategic intention. 2.Not targeting China: objections to the “New Cold War” and trying to change the Chinese domestic system.</p>	Ukraine and Taiwan questions
	<p>Secondary discourses: 1.US is not pursuing conflicts but welcoming competition. 2.Communication to manage competition in both.</p>	<p>Secondary discourses 1.Solve the Ukraine question through negotiation. 2.Peace, international law, UN Charter.</p>	
Recent developments	<p>Central discourse: Democracy vs. Authoritarian 1. Rebuild US Soul and dignity. 2. Recovering the economy. 3. Integration with democracy. 4. Unfair trade by China</p>	<p>Central discourse: justice, global development. 1.Global Security Initiative. 2.Multilateralism with the UN. 3.RCEP, BRI, South-South cooperation. 4. Taiwan question.</p>	Competition with alliance G7 vs. South-South cooperation
	<p>Secondary discourses: 1.international system based on rules. 2.disinformation and conspiracy from Chines official media.</p>	<p>Secondary discourses: Solemn stand on Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, South China Sea, human rights, and religion.</p>	

	3. Interwinning use of strategic ambiguity and clearness on Taiwan question.		
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The author makes this Sheet.

4.2 Toward a multi-polar international system? US National Security Strategy

Biden administration published its National Security Strategy on October 12, 2022. In this report, there are several points need to be addressed:

First, the US admits that major powers' competition will last for a decade. As it is shown, “we are now in the early years of a decisive decade for America and the world” (White House, 2022g: 6). Under such competition, the coming international structure is much more like a multi-polar system rather than US-China competition. “post-Cold War era is definitively over, and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next” (White House, 2022g: 6).

It explained why the US returned to the original standpoint, as shown in the Biden-Xi talk before the Russian invasion. Because of the long-lasting competition and the coming multi-polar system, the US needs alliances to continue to compete with China and Russia. However, it still needs to cooperate with competitors on "shared challenges that cross borders" simultaneously.

Secondly, the traditional balance of power policy is vital under a multi-polar system. Therefore, it stressed, "Democracies and autocracies are engaged in a contest to show which system of governance can best deliver for their people and the world." "Russia poses an immediate threat...The PRC, by contrast, is the only competitor intending to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective" (White Hose, 2022g: 7-8). Therefore, the US needs to use diplomacy to build the strongest possible coalitions, including NATO, EU, AUKUS, Quad, G7, and even ASEAN and African countries, to counter the threats from autocracies(White House, 2022g: 17-18). The Indo-Pacific region is still the main theater in the US-China competition. Competition exists in investment, network of allies, and vision for the future, and different areas, such as technological, economic, political, military, intelligence, and global governance domains(White House, 2022g: 24). Next, I will discuss the implication for East Asian countries.

4.3 Implication for the Middle East and peacebuilding

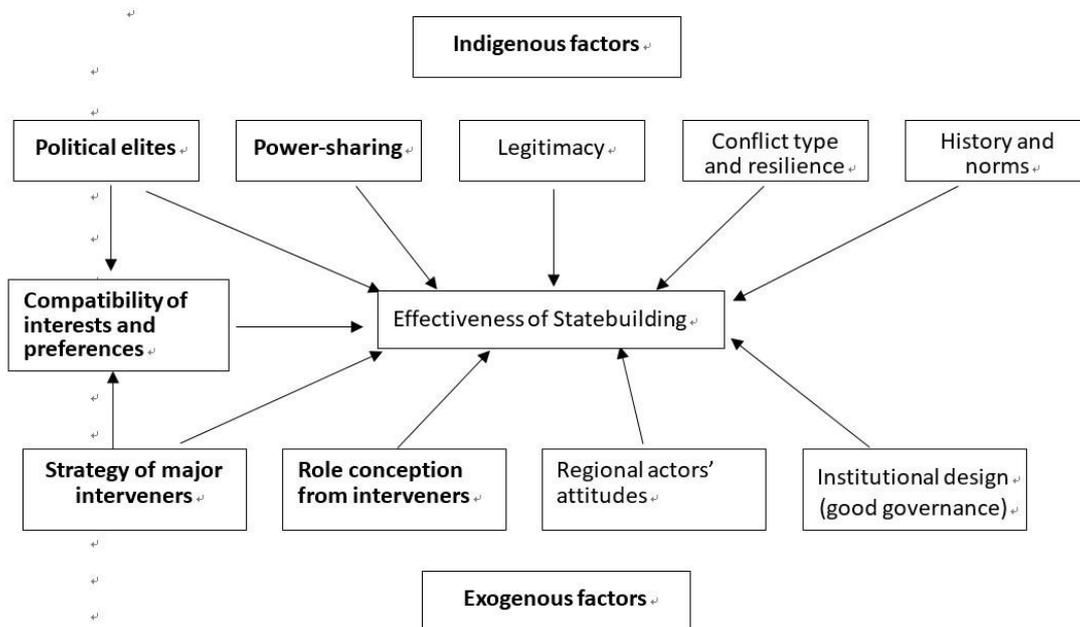
The implication for the Middle East seems clear: the competition among major powers will continue for an extended period. Thus, choices between “democracies and autocracies,” “deterrence and diplomacy,” and “rule-based and mutual benefit” will be continuing options for many countries. Taiwan question will still be one of the priorities from Xi Jinping, significantly when he consolidates his power again at the 20th Communist party congress. In this paper, we have seen that Taiwan is always the bargaining chip on the negotiation table. The choices for the government in Taiwan are pretty straightforward, which is, “depend on the US, period.” However, it was workable when there was a “New Cold War” or confrontation between two groups, as mentioned above. Then, Taiwan can only choose the democratic group to deter China, even losing some economic benefits to gain security assurance and survive. But under a multi-polar system? Is the choice still the same as the two major powers' confrontation? We have seen different “role expectations” from Trump and Biden administrations. Under Tsai Ing-Wen’s administration and the ruling party's ideology, DPP, “role perception” is rigid and continuous. Nevertheless, with different leaders in democracies, there might be diversified role expectations and conflicts in the future after every election.

The other meaning for the Middle East goes back to peacebuilding itself. In academic discussions, the effectiveness of peacebuilding combines two categories(as shown in the chart below): indigenous and exogenous factors. Among the indigenous factors, political elites(role conception), power-sharing(interests), legitimacy(government formation), conflict type and resilience(willingness of cooperation), and history or norms(depth of cooperation) are essential factors that affect the success of peacebuilding. Exogenous factors are: strategies of major interveners(worldview), role conception from interveners, regional actors' attitudes, and institutional design(related to good governance or not). However, this paper considers that among these factors, the compatibility of interests and preferences among domestic political elites themselves and with foreign interveners is the most crucial factor that leads to successful peacebuilding.

After analyzing Biden-Xi talks before and after the Russian invasion, China's diplomacy during the pandemic, and the US National Security Strategy, it is evident that both countries see each other as major competitors. Under their evaluation, it will

be a multi-polar international system in decades, as Turkish leaders predicted several years ago. Also, the Middle East might be an arena for pursuing alliances for the US and China, but not the only one. For China, the most critical card it wants to play is BRI and Taiwan issue, as shown. Moreover, for the US, competition with China and adding obstacles for China to become a hegemon or superpower in the future is the primary goal.

Chart: Indigenous and exogenous factors of statebuilding



For post-conflict countries or countries in the Middle East, hedging is a reviving option. Like Taiwan, many countries meet obstacles in choices under US-China competition. As discussed above, both US and China are pursuing allies and partners in the coming decades. While China's BRI revived, the IPEF offers the other choice, which the US labels as "rule-based" and not risky because of China's "debt trap." However, future competition between the US and China relies heavily upon allies' support. Since the US cannot afford to compete with China and Russia itself without solid support from the alliance, it might alter its priorities when it meets some obstacles.

Taiwan Strait, for example, might be safer if Japan and Korea stand together with the US on whether to protect the status quo of Taiwan. It could add some difficulties for China to use force because of the risk it loses. However, if regional alliances do

not want to stand with the US, the US might be much more hesitant to support Taiwan and prefer diplomatic ways to solve the disputes. Ukraine war will be a vivid example for us when winter comes. With the support and solidarity from the Western countries, deterrence from Russia has worked well till now. Nevertheless, how long can this support last? Different administrations in each country might have their role perception, and examining this intervening variable is somehow important in the academy and decision-making process.

5. Conclusion

Here is the crucial problem: democracies confront autocracies. This paper suggests that we use neo-classical Realism, role theory, and narrative analysis to deal with leaders' image, role-play of leaders, role expectations from other countries, and role perception of his/her own. Moreover, this paper suggests that starting with the changing international structure is better. However, political leaders and scholars often predict the international systems with hindsight; we must analyze intervening variables that neo-classical realists and role theorists propose: leaders' image, domestic institutions, and state-society relations. It is challenging to know the decision-making process in authoritarian regimes. For example, we will never know what happened to Hu Jintao in the 20th Communist Party Congress.

For Taiwan, since it is put on the negotiation table by China, it is much more like a question of survival and how to maintain its status quo. Alliance support is crucial for the US and Taiwan's attitude. However, it is much easier to choose between two confronting groups but riskier for Taiwan to have some military conflicts as is happening in Ukraine. The ongoing multi-polar system is much more complicated for leaders in countries all over the world to decide from many options like hedging, alliance, not involved, etc. It still needs some patience to discover the recovery of the economic situation after the pandemic. Whether the BRI will revive in East Asia, Central Asia, and even the Middle East, or how the western countries can consolidate their partners will lead to a different road map of the world.

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