**The Long Period of Strategic Stalemate Between USA and China 2020-2050**

**In 2025, Will China and the United States Enter a New Period of Intensified Battle?**

**December 2023**

**Author Huang Renwei is the Vice President**[**of the China International Relations Society , Dean of**](https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E5%85%B3%E7%B3%BB%E5%AD%A6%E4%BC%9A/5503303?fromModule=lemma_inlink)[**the Institute of International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs of Shanghai International Studies University**](https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%8A%E6%B5%B7%E5%A4%96%E5%9B%BD%E8%AF%AD%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%A6%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E5%85%B3%E7%B3%BB%E4%B8%8E%E5%A4%96%E4%BA%A4%E4%BA%8B%E5%8A%A1%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6%E9%99%A2/645441?fromModule=lemma_inlink)

**The Historical Origin and Phases of the Sino-US “Strategic Stalemate”**

The concept of "strategic stalemate phase" was proposed by Mao Zedong in his On Protracted War during the Anti-Japanese War. Mao proposed that the Anti-Japanese War included three phases: Japan's strategic offensive, China's strategic stalemate with Japan, and China's strategic counterattack. This article borrows this concept to describe the development trend of Sino-US relations.

**Today's Sino-US strategic stalemate**

Compared with the period of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, today's Sino-US strategic stalemate has three main differences.

First, the most fundamental difference is that the Sino-US strategic competition is not in a state of war, while the strategic stalemate during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression was completely in a state of war.

Second, the next stage of the Sino-US strategic stalemate is not a strategic counterattack stage, China does not have the strategic goal of completely defeating the United States.

Third, after a long period of strategic stalemate, Sino-US relations will enter a state of coexistence and co-governance.

The so-called new type of major power relations can only be formed after a long period of competition in strategic stalemate.

From a theoretical perspective, "strategic stalemate" should contain three characteristics: First, the forces of the two sides in the strategic stalemate are relatively balanced. Only when neither side has an overwhelming advantage can the "strategic stalemate" be maintained.

Second, over a long period of time, it is difficult for either side to defeat the other, and there is no distinction between victory and defeat.

Third, both sides have strong institutional confidence to maintain the resilience of the strategic stalemate. The United States is confident that it will maintain world hegemony for more than 50 years, and China is confident that it will achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by 2050, that is, the second centenary goal.

**How long will the strategic stalemate last?**

It will be about 30 years from 2021 to 2050. This depends not only on the conditions for China to achieve its goal of becoming a modernized powerful country, but also on the changes in the balance of power between the United States and China.

Since China has proposed the goal of "two centuries", the long-term strategic plan for China by American think tanks also defines the time coordinate as 2050. The 2020 strategic report released by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a US strategic think tank, defines the time period of Sino-US strategic competition as 2020-2050. Another important think tank, the "2049 Center", also defines the time period of Sino-US strategic competition as 2020-2050.

The name of the think tank "2049 Center" is based on China's second centenary goal as its hypothetical object. It can be seen that 2050 is the strategic expected goal of both sides, and this goal positioning determines the time dimension of the stalemate stage. In these 30 years, as long as the balance of power between the two sides does not reverse, strategic competition will always exist as the new normal of Sino-US relations.

**Three Characteristics of the Sino-US Strategic Stalemate**

One of the characteristics of the Sino-US strategic stalemate is the duality of the Sino-US power structure.

The duality of the two countries is the basic characteristic of the strategic stalemate. The United States has maintained a relatively strong force during its long decline period, and China has always had weaknesses during its rise. This duality of the two sides is the main axis of the great changes that have not been seen in a century, and will change over time.

The duality of the United States is reflected in the widening gap between its hegemonic power and its goals.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the United States and the Soviet Union were two superpowers, and the United States' world hegemony was not complete. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the world's only superpower, and American hegemony constituted a "unipolar world" of "one superpower and many strong countries".

After the 2008 international financial crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, American hegemony showed a trajectory of decline, and the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the Ukrainian crisis further demonstrated the existence of this trajectory.

The decline of US hegemony is a long historical process, during which the US still maintains its position as the most powerful country.

The US still has the strongest financial control, scientific and technological innovation, military strike and public opinion shaping capabilities in the world. The decline of hegemony does not mean the weakening of the US comprehensive national strength. The current international system, including the United Nations system, the Western alliance system and the international monetary and financial system, was established under the leadership of the United States after World War II, and the United States still has a decisive influence in these instiutions.

International rules, especially international economic rules, are largely created by the United States. The so-called "rules-based international order" is essentially a "world order based on American rules."

The decline of hegemony refers to the continuous decline of the United States' status and ability to lead international affairs, including the gradual weakening of the United States' right to shape the international system, the right to create international rules, the dominant power of international discourse, the right to guarantee international security, and the right to mint the dollar as the world currency.

In terms of maintaining, reforming, innovating, and providing public goods in the international system, the United States has increasingly shown serious inadequacies. During the Trump era, the United States continued to break rules and "withdraw from groups". After Biden came to power, the United States began to restore the rules and re-dominate them.

The dollar hegemony as a world currency serves the US strategy, controls the economic lifeline of other countries, and arbitrarily imposes economic sanctions on other countries. Based on the "dollar hegemony" with the function of world currency, it increasingly serves its own interests, and its function and credit as a world currency are weakening. The decline of the dollar hegemony is one of the important manifestations of the decline of US hegemony.

The rise and fall of national power is reflected in the power comparison between different countries. Compared with China's rapid rise since the 21st century, the growth of American power is in a state of relative decline.

However, compared with Europe and Japan, the rise of American power is obviously faster than them. The power gap between the United States, Europe and Japan has further widened.

The United States still has the leading ability among Western allies, and there is even a tendency for the United States to strengthen its control over Western allies. If the comprehensive strength of the United States and its allies is viewed as a whole, the gap between China and the United States is still quite large, and the historical inertia of the United States as a superpower will continue for a long time.

In the strategic stalemate phase, the balance of power and power transfer between China and the United States produce structural contradictions, but this contradiction can have two development trends: confrontation and cooperation. Here we need to consider several issues:

**First, will there inevitably be a confrontation between the rising power and the established power during the power transfer process?**

Will the scale and speed of the power transfer from the established power to the rising power lead to or avoid a full-scale confrontation between the two? Will this power transfer be reversed, leading to the failure of the rising power, or will it lead to the accelerated decline of the established power?

Second, will the narrowing power gap between the rising power and the established power reach a limit and lead to a strategic showdown? China and the United States are the world's first and second largest economies, respectively, with great weight and comparable scale.

The gap between China and the United States in terms of economic volume is narrowing rapidly. In 2001, China's economic volume was 10% of that of the United States, but by 2022 it was 77% of that of the United States. Historically, the "iron rule" that the United States could accept the second largest country's economic volume limit of 60% of that of the United States has been broken. The process of China's economic volume rising from 70% to 100% of that of the United States has been greatly shortened. If the United States cannot prevent China from reaching or exceeding the total size of the United States, then what is the limit of China's rise that the United States can accept, and will exceeding this limit lead to a strategic showdown between the two countries.

Third, the structural contradictions between China and the United States may transform into a confrontational relationship under certain conditions, and may also transform into a cooperative relationship under other conditions. China and the United States have a high degree of interdependence and interest correlation. Neither side can completely abandon the complementary relationship with the other and implement the so-called "decoupling". Whether it is global, regional or bilateral issues, they can only be alleviated or resolved through cooperation between China and the United States rather than confrontation. Sino-US relations will be in a state of swinging between quasi-confrontation and quasi-cooperation for a long time.

The structural contradictions between China and the United States are reflected in the strategic competition in the three major areas of the global market, the two systems and geopolitics, and are characterized by the coexistence of confrontation, compromise and cooperation. As China maintains its upward momentum and reaches a state of balance with the United States, the confrontation of the structural contradictions between China and the United States will decrease, and confrontation will shift to compromise and cooperation.

**The second characteristic of the Sino-US strategic stalemate is the long-term nature of the transformation of the international system.**

The transformation faced by the contemporary international system is different from the system transformation in history. Most of the system transformations in the past changed the international system in the form of war, and the Cold War pattern was also largely determined by the confrontation between the two military groups. The transformation of the contemporary international system is largely a non-war transformation (war transformation caused by sudden crises is not excluded), and its characteristics are gradual and long-term. This characteristic is basically parallel to the long-term nature of the Sino-US strategic stalemate.

**First, the Western-dominated world system is in trouble.**

 For a long time, the West had an absolute advantage of 80% to 90% of the world's total economy, but now it has dropped to a weak advantage of 50% to 60%. The West's dominance in wealth distribution and international affairs is being weakened, and emerging economies and developing countries can, to a certain extent, restrict the rise and fall of the Western economy. China accounts for 1/3 of the world's economic growth and 1/3 of the total economic output of developing countries, and its influence on the Western economy is also increasing.

Secondly, due to the inertia of the world system dominated by the West, even if the Western economy falls below 50% of the global economy, it will still be at the center of the international system for a long time. The Western-dominated global governance, namely the "Western governance" system, can neither reflect the rise of emerging powers nor give them enough room to rise. It is difficult for the West to accept the concepts and power structures of emerging powers and coexist with them, but the globalized economy does not allow the West and the non-West to be divided into two market systems. This requires a long process of mutual adjustment.

Furthermore, Western countries (including some developing countries) are accustomed to accepting the leadership of the United States and find it difficult to accept an international order dominated by an emerging power (China).

This psychological state of "peace under American rule" will take a long time to change. It is also difficult for emerging powers to start from scratch and create a new international system. Only when the hegemonic country itself can no longer support the old international system, can a new international system replace it.

From China's perspective, for more than 40 years since 1980, China has always been in the process of integrating into the Western-dominated international system. In the next 30 years, China will face the situation of exclusion of China by the Western system led by the United States, and will have to shift from integration to shaping and changing the existing international structure and system. This requires strong global governance capabilities and advanced global governance concepts, and such capabilities and concepts require the cultivation and promotion of several generations to be established. For example, the problem of insufficient capacity encountered in the construction of the "Belt and Road" is not the lack of investment and construction capabilities, but China's insufficient ability to persuade other countries to accept the "Belt and Road" in the world system. The exchange of positions between China and the world and the relationship between China and the United States requires a long and repeated process to achieve qualitative changes.

The third characteristic of the Sino-US strategic stalemate is the limited confrontation between China and the United States.

**The confrontation between China and the United States in the strategic stalemate is limited and partial.**

China itself has no intention of a full confrontation with the United States, which does not meet the requirements of China's development strategy goals by 2050. The United States' ability and will to confront China are also limited, because such a confrontation requires the United States to consume several times its own national strength and may not achieve its goals. The limited confrontation between China and the United States is the basic condition for the relative stability of the strategic stalemate.

During the four years of Trump's administration, the United States once tried to implement a strategy of unbridled confrontation with China. At one point, all resources were gathered to launch an "all-government, all-factor, all-round" offensive against China, including extreme pressure in economic, technical, public opinion, propaganda war, partial military, and using allies and China's internal channels.

Facts have proved that the United States cannot defeat China, but instead China makes the United States pay too high a cost. Taking the Sino-US trade war as an example, Trump imposed high import tariffs on Chinese goods worth 500 billion US dollars, of which 92% of the tariff burden was transferred to domestic American consumers and producers in the United States, resulting in a sharp rise in domestic prices in the United States and triggering inflation.

The consequences of the US technology war against China will be the same. The negative consequences of the US's technological attack on China will gradually become apparent. US high-tech companies will lose the Chinese market, their largest source of profit, and thus reduce their R&D investment, reducing their development potential, while stimulating China's independent innovation capabilities. If the US launches a comprehensive financial war against China, the US dollar system will be unprecedentedly shaken or even collapsed, and the world economy will come to a complete standstill. The consequences will be far greater than trade wars and technology wars.

**It is extremely risky for the United States to engage in a full-scale military war with China.**

The United States cannot afford to fight a local war with China, let alone a nuclear war. The current federal debt is already more than 150% of the U.S. GDP. If the United States engages in a military war with China, it will have to at least double its current military spending to about $1.5 trillion. If the war lasts for several years, even if there is no nuclear war, the credit of the U.S. dollar, the U.S. treasury and the U.S. stock market will collapse completely, and it will be difficult to win militarily. To defeat China, the United States needs at least twice the national strength, financial resources and military strength of China. Obviously, it is impossible for the United States to mobilize such huge resources to defeat China.

Based on the above basic estimates, US President Biden declared to Chinese President Xi Jinping that "the United States does not seek to change China's system, does not seek a new Cold War with China, does not seek to oppose China by strengthening the alliance, and does not support Taiwan's independence." Although there is a problem of the United States saying one thing and doing another, it is after all the official recognition and statement of the limited strategic confrontation between China and the United States by the highest level of the United States. It is not in the interests of the United States to confront China comprehensively. There are only two possibilities that can change the limited nature of the confrontation between China and the United States: one is that China makes a subversive strategic mistake and interrupts its peaceful rise. The probability of this possibility is very low; the other is that the anti-China forces in the United States absolutely dominate its decision-making level and launch a full-scale Cold War or even a hot war against China regardless of the consequences. The probability of this possibility is also relatively low. As time goes by, China's power will surpass that of the United States in all aspects. When the United States cannot confront China and can only face reality and compromise with China, the strategic confrontation between China and the United States will change from limited to non-confrontational.

**Three Decades of Strategic Stalemate: Continuous Changes in the Balance of Power**

The length of the strategic stalemate phase depends on how fast the balance of power between the two sides changes. This power refers to the comprehensive competitiveness of all factors including economy, military, diplomacy, politics and public opinion. At present, the biggest gap between China and the United States is in the field of science and technology, which determines the advanced nature of USA manufacturing and is also related to cultural and institutional competitiveness.

**Scientific and technological competitiveness is the decisive factor in contemporary comprehensive national strength.**

The speed of China's scientific and technological development determines the length of the strategic stalemate phase. In the four fields of science and technology, military, finance and soft power, the United States still has an advantage. The gap between China and the United States is narrowing, but it is still obvious. China has made breakthroughs in some areas, such as Huawei's leading 5G technology.

The advanced level that Huawei has achieved in communication technology will be achieved by Chinese companies in other fields in the next 10 years or so. In the past two years, China's high-tech industry has been pressed by the United States, which has prompted China to accelerate the pace of independent innovation in science and technology. By 2035, it is possible for China's basic technology field to approach the level of the United States; and by 2050, there will be a foundation for China to keep pace with the United States in the field of science.

In April 2021, the International Monetary Fund predicted that China's GDP will reach about 90% of that of the United States by 2026, and will be on par with the United States in 2027-2028.

The London International Institute for Strategic Studies predicts that China's GDP will catch up with that of the United States in 2028. The assessments of these international organizations are more optimistic than China's own assessment. From the perspective of exchange rate calculation, it is a relatively moderate forecast that China's GDP will be on par with that of the United States in 2030. If the United States maintains an average annual growth rate of 2% in the next 10 years and China maintains a growth rate of 5%, by 2030, China's total economic output will surpass that of the United States, with a per capita GDP of 20,000 US dollars and a total of between 25 trillion and 28 trillion US dollars, which is a relatively moderate expected goal. Although China is crossing the US warning line to strike the second major power, the 10 years from 2021 to 2030 will still be the most intense and dangerous period of strategic competition between China and the United States, and all conflict points are most likely to erupt during this period.

If China's economic output catches up with that of the United States in the first decade from 2020 to 2030, and China's comprehensive national strength catches up with that of the United States in the second decade from 2030 to 2040, the balance of power between China and the United States in the strategic stalemate stage will undergo a decisive change. In the third decade from 2040 to 2050, China will catch up with the United States in major fields, including major science and technology fields. By 2020, China's number of corporate patents and the number of papers published in core journals of natural sciences have surpassed the United States. In terms of higher-end indicators such as the number of Nobel Prizes, China is still in a state of obvious lag. Based on the large number of innovative achievements and basic research results, China has hope of surpassing the United States in the field of science and technology in the third decade.

**The biggest gap between China and the United States is in the field of soft power**

The biggest gap between China and the United States is in the field of soft power, including the "broad soft power" and "institutional flexibility" of various cultural carriers and communication capabilities. The ability of the US ideology and institutional model to infiltrate and subvert other countries is almost everywhere.

It is very difficult to encourage countries around the world to widely accept Chinese information and culture. In the next 30 years of strategic stalemate, the United States will make more use of its soft power advantages, and its cost-effectiveness of benefits far exceeds that of hard power confrontation. Therefore, the intensity of the soft power competition between China and the United States will exceed that of hard power competition. This is a long-term trend. The faster the US hard power declines, the more it will use its soft power advantages to confront China.

The power comparison between China and the United States involves both explicit and implicit factors. Explicit factors include "visible" factors such as military power, scientific and technological power, and the power of the US dollar.

 Implicit factors mainly refer to factors related to soft power that are "not easy to see" and difficult to count with data, such as the extent to which China can cultivate the same number and quality of scientific and technological talents as the United States. In terms of implicit factors, China's disadvantages are also obvious. There is a clear gap in cultural education between China and the United States. Among the top 10 universities in the world, 8 are American universities, and 50 of the top 100 are American universities. Peking University and Tsinghua University are currently ranked in the top 30 in the world, and it will take a long time to narrow the gap with the top American universities. The key to the invisible power gap between China and the United States is that the United States uses propaganda warfare to distort China's image.

**We must dialectically understand the power gap between China and the United States**

We must dialectically understand the power gap between China and the United States and realize the transformation of China's power advantages and disadvantages. We must transform the quantitative growth model into the qualitative enhancement model, that is, to achieve high-quality development. Realizing the qualitative transformation of China's economy and domestic governance in the 30 years of the strategic stalemate is China's core task for the next 30 years. This domestic development strategy issue, placed in the framework of the Sino-US strategic stalemate, is an international strategic issue. It determines whether we can transform our disadvantages into advantages and strategic resources into strategic capabilities during the strategic stalemate.

Possessing the world's largest market capacity is China's greatest strategic advantage, which will have a decisive impact on the power comparison between China and the United States during the strategic stalemate. China currently has a population of 1.4 billion and a per capita GDP of $10,000. If the GDP doubles, it will become 28 trillion, or 20,000 per capita. This is a goal that can be achieved with a high probability by 2030. If the United States rises to 28 trillion US dollars, it will need to achieve a per capita GDP of 90,000 US dollars by 2030, which is quite difficult. China's market potential is very huge. The ability to absorb foreign goods imports can be transformed into international economic cooperation capabilities, and the ability to export goods can be transformed into foreign investment capabilities and infrastructure construction capabilities. The "Belt and Road" is actually the transformation of China's domestic market potential into overseas market projection capabilities. Market capacity is also cultural communication capabilities to a certain extent, which can be transformed into the ability to create international system rules. Market size will determine the right to create market rules. Countries along the "Belt and Road" will implement a new international rule of "four-in-one" of Western rules, United Nations rules, Chinese rules and local country rules, rather than a single American rule. The competition for rules will be a reflection of the combination of market competition and strategic competition between China and the United States.

During the strategic stalemate between China and the United States, the power of the United States also has its limitations. The limitations of American power essentially reflect the potential crisis of the United States. The most obvious is the federal fiscal crisis. In the first quarter of 2022, the U.S. federal debt has reached 30 trillion U.S. dollars, which is 140% of the U.S. GDP.

The interest on federal debt alone will take up 1/3 of the federal annual budget. The huge deficit of the U.S. federal debt and the U.S. federal finances has forced the United States to "default" and "rob" a lot in international affairs, causing serious damage to the credit and image of the United States. The gap between the almost bankrupt U.S. finances and the huge expenditures required for the strategic competition between China and the United States is the biggest limitation of American power. Kissinger once judged that the biggest threat to U.S. security comes from federal debt. The larger the federal debt, the more dangerous the United States. This warning hits the mark.

The current US economy is in three huge bubbles: the first is the US debt bubble, the second is the inflation bubble, and the third is the US stock market bubble. The US inflation rate has reached 8%, the highest in nearly 40 years. The inflation rate will continue to rise after the Ukrainian crisis. Stimulated by 10 consecutive years of loose monetary policy since 2011, the US stock market has risen from more than 10,000 points at the beginning of 2020 to more than 30,000 points. In the face of the severe COVID-19 pandemic and the risk of economic recession, the stock market is in a state of excitement of false prosperity. The consequence of unlimited issuance of US dollars is bound to be a decline in the value of the US dollar, and the Federal Reserve has issued a large amount of currency to purchase government bonds. The three factors of debt, stock market and inflation are superimposed, and one loss will cause loss to all. The US authorities abused the world currency function of the US dollar, trying to overflow and digest US inflation worldwide, and transfer the US crisis to countries around the world. In this Ukrainian crisis, the United States used the SWIFT system to attack Russia and the energy price increase to attack the euro. After both Europe and Russia were weakened, abusing the hegemony of the US dollar to attack China was the next choice. However, China has a strong ability to resist attacks that neither the EU nor Russia has, which will cause the US dollar to encounter unprecedented counterattacks, and all countries will be cautious about the consequences of the abuse of US dollar hegemony. Therefore, the crisis of US dollar hegemony is the biggest strategic limitation of the United States.

Separatist tendencies within the United States

The centrifugal tendency in the United States is becoming more and more serious, which will constrain the United States' ability to contain China. In the past two years, various separatist tendencies in the United States have reached their highest point since the 20th century, and their complexity exceeds that of the American Civil War. Serious racial divisions and profound polarization between the rich and the poor are intertwined, highlighting the opposition between the 1% and the 99%. The "red states" of the Republican Party and the "blue states" of the Democratic Party have formed regional divisions, and the central-local division between the federal and state governments has been triggered by the epidemic. These problems are superimposed on each other. The advantage of the United States is the stock, and the problem it faces is the increment. The stock is getting smaller and smaller, and the increment is getting larger and larger. This is an insurmountable constraint for the United States in the strategic stalemate stage.

Seize the buffer period of the battle and postpone the strategic showdown between China and the United States

The concept of "strategic stalemate phase" is conducive to the overall grasp of the trend of Sino-US relations and to maintaining strategic determination, so that we will not follow the policy adjustments of the US presidential change. Taking advantage of the periodic cyclical changes will help us gain the strategic initiative. The characteristics of the buffer period are that the strategic goals and directions of the United States have not changed, the intensity of the Sino-US confrontation has decreased, and the dialogue, compromise and cooperation between the two sides have been partially restored.

Assuming that the strategic stalemate phase is divided into three 10-year periods, at least two presidents will change office in each 10-year period. Every time a president takes office or steps down, US policies will be adjusted or even turned. In this adjustment and turning process, there will be intensification and buffering of campaign phases, which can be called "campaign intensification period" and "campaign buffer period" . The strategic stalemate phase is completed in the alternating process of intensification and buffering.

Sino-US relations during the strategic stalemate period are characterized by a process of alternating between a longer campaign intensification period (3 to 5 years) and a shorter campaign buffer period (2 to 3 years). Seizing the campaign buffer period is a key step to avoid a full-scale confrontation between China and the United States during the strategic stalemate stage. If we want to avoid a strategic showdown between China and the United States in 20 to 30 years, we must seize several of the buffer periods, digest the sequelae left by the previous intensification period, and prepare to deal with the crisis that may arise in the next intensification period. In the intensification period, we must strike the invading enemy tit for tat, and in the buffer period, we must pay attention to being reasonable, beneficial, and moderate, maintain and expand the content of cooperation, extend the buffer period as much as possible, and postpone the outbreak point of the strategic showdown between China and the United States. This is the dialectical relationship between strategic stalemate and campaign buffer. Time is on our side, and the direction of power transfer is in our favor. Making good use of the buffer period is an important condition for us to transform the strategic stalemate stage into a strategic opportunity period.

**Biden's coming to power had triggered the first battle buffer period**.

Biden's coming to power triggered the first battle buffer period. The alternating cycle of the first battle intensification and battle buffer occurred between Trump's administration and Biden's coming to power. Between 2019 and 2020, key members of Biden's foreign policy team, such as Blinken, Sullivan, and Campbell, published a number of articles on China policy in mainstream media such as Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, The Washington Post, and The New York Times, elaborating on their basic strategy for adjusting China policy after taking office. The fierce conflict of the US presidential election at the end of 2020, and the Republicans and Democrats engaged in a life-and-death struggle for power. All these indicate that there will be a battle buffer period after Biden takes office.

**There is a difference between the main members of the Biden team and the extreme right wing of the Trump team, such as Pompeo, Bolton and Bannon.** This can be seen as the difference between "rational suppression" and "irrational anti-China acts", which has led to the alternation of "buffer period" and "intensification period". If Pompeo and others continue to govern after 2021, Sino-US relations will fall off a cliff, and there may be a dangerous prospect of a strategic showdown. In comparison, the emergence of one or several "battle buffer periods" to avoid continued intensification and a cliff-like fall is objectively conducive to the stability of the strategic stalemate stage.

However, we have seen that there has been no obvious buffer in the first half of the year after Biden took office, or the buffer has been less than expected. There are three reasons for this: First, the obstacles set by Trump are very large, and it is difficult to eliminate policy inertia in the short term. The political atmosphere in Washington is still "anti-China political correctness" . Second, the two major parties in the United States have reached a consensus to position China as the number one strategic opponent. No matter which party comes to power, this strategic positioning will not change even in the buffer period. Third, the ideological factors of Biden's team's China policy are very strong, and its precise "small courtyard high wall" strategy is more confusing and appealing than the strong anti-China stance of the Trump team.

There are two main new strategies added in Biden's adjustment of China policy. One is to lock China with rules (i.e. "rule lock"), and to lock China's international behavior within the scope of "non-compliant" or even "illegal" as much as possible. The other is to establish a new multilateral mechanism (i.e. the so-called "fake multilateralism"), which is actually a "united front" led by the United States and aimed at opposing China. The United States's targeting of China with multilateral mechanisms is one of the characteristics of Biden's adjustment of China policy after he took office. This is only different in form from Trump's unilateral attack on China.

When a new administration takes office in 2025, China and the United States will enter a new period of intensified battles. Whether it is the extreme right wing of the Republican Party or the Democratic establishment, they will inevitably launch fierce attacks on China. Because the first decade to 2030 is very close, the psychological pressure of being surpassed by China in terms of total volume is already unbearable for the United States.

The alternation of the first round of intensification and buffer periods provides us with a typical template for the intensification and buffering of Sino-US relations. A careful analysis of the internal logic of this cycle will help us reveal the regularity of the strategic stalemate stage and will also help us promote the healthy transformation of Sino-US relations and help China and the United States jointly assume the responsibility of maintaining peace and development.