

# Bill Kaplan: War with China or economic competition

Posted on Monday, Mar 6, 2023

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The first congressional hearing by the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party ran into trouble immediately. The committee had promised to “draw a distinction between the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people.” However, prior to the committee’s hearing, Texas GOP Representative Lance Gooden attacked California Democratic Representative Judy Chu, the first Chinese American Congresswoman. Gooden said: “I question her ... loyalty or competence.”

Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher, committee chair, condemned Gooden: “Absolutely, we shouldn’t question anybody’s loyalty. ... Joseph McCarthy’s from my district, he’s buried in my district; we need not exhume his body and reanimate it.” A good response. But racism still hung over the hearing. In October, Trump attacked Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell’s wife, Elaine Chao, Trump’s former transportation secretary. Chao was born in Taiwan and later became a U.S. citizen. Trump disparaged her as McConnell’s “China loving wife, Coco Chow!”

Another cloud overhanging the committee’s hearing was Gallagher’s handiwork. He referred to the “existential struggle” against China. Regime change? Gallagher began the hearing with a video showcasing China as a communist authoritarian society that tramples on human rights. No disagreement here, but hardly news. It was back to the 1950s, the height of the Cold War. Some of the committee witnesses stressed the military threat from China, calling for a U.S. military buildup. The old Nixon, before he changed U.S. policy towards China, would have been high-fiving Gallagher and his witnesses. It was Nixon who played a central role in creating Cold War hysteria and fear of “Red China.” Nixon also pretended that anti-communist Taiwan, led by the losing side in the Chinese civil war, was the real China. He later dramatically reversed course, hoping to use the conflict between China and the Soviet Union to attain U.S. foreign policy goals.

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The recent U.S. downing of a China spy balloon, subsequent shoot downs of other (perhaps weather) balloons, unproven allegations that COVID leaked from a lab in China and China's bullying of neighboring nations has upset the China-U.S. applecart. But talk of an "existential struggle" is dangerous and misleading. "The United States spends more on defense than the next 9 countries combined" - China, India, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea - in descending order of spending (Peter G. Peterson Foundation). Moreover, China has 350+ nuclear warheads, more than enough to annihilate the United States.

Regime change and war must be avoided. Groupthink from Republicans and Democrats is dangerous. The U.S. and China need to talk and reduce tensions. Moreover, the U.S. can unilaterally reduce its trade deficit and loss of industrial jobs to China with ramping up the Biden administration's bipartisan industrial policy. The infrastructure legislation and the U.S.-made chips bill passed by Congress (both opposed by Gallagher) are a great beginning. But more must be done. Gallagher would be smart to focus mainly on U.S. industrial policy, made in America legislation and well-paying American jobs. Competition — not war.

*-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*