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The U.S.' Coercive Diplomacy toward China in 2025 and the Future Prospects of Its Strategic Coercive Diplomacy

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Abstract: This research conducted a comprehensive analysis of Washington's strategic application of coercive diplomacy toward Beijing, focusing on three principal dimensions: political, economic, and military. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of coercive diplomacy, the Truman Doctrine, and "Trump's Transactional Diplomacy," the study employed a hybrid methodology combining content and event data analysis to examine diplomatic behaviors, political statements, tariff policies, technological measures, and military maneuvers enacted by the Trump 2.0 administration. First, Washington utilized coercive measures to reaffirm its global superiority over China. Domestic self-reliance initiatives, such as the AI Action Plan, aimed to demonstrate that U.S. endogenous capabilities remained competitive with China's manufacturing infrastructure. Second, the strategic deployment of its alliance system underscored America's intent to assert leadership over a globally integrated network of political, economic, and defense partnerships, contrasting with China's comparatively modest coalition. Third, coercive diplomacy extended beyond Sino-American dynamics; the Trump administration applied similar pressure tactics toward strategic partners worldwide, often leveraging economic dominance through tariff threats. Strategically, coercive diplomacy toward China appeared poised to become a long-term doctrine, as countering Beijing represented one of the few bipartisan convergences in U.S. politics. In response, China was expected to reinforce domestic resilience and alliance-building to prepare for sustained confrontation. This rivalry was likely to trigger the most extensive multidimensional competition in modern history. Developing nations must adopt proactive, neutral diplomacy to strengthen internal capacities, while they should avoid positioning themselves as adversaries to either superpower.

Keywords: Trump's doctrine; U.S. allies; U.S. coercive diplomacy; U.S.- China competition.

JEL Classification: F51; F52; F13; F59.

Introduction

The U.S. coercive diplomacy has represented one of the key manifestations of the broader "stick-and-carrot" strategy, in which the American government combined threats with persuasive efforts to compel opposing actors to limit or cease behaviors deemed contrary to U.S. interests (McCready, 2005). Operating under the belief that China had been a severe violator of trade norms and posed a threat to American economic interests, President Trump initiated two rounds of trade warfare during his two presidential terms. Scholars distinguish compellence (demanding an active change) from deterrence (dissuading an action) and note that compellence generally requires clearer deadlines and is harder to succeed than deterrence.

Previous studies found that the U.S. practiced military threats or limited strikes, economic sanctions and financial tools, trade restrictions and tariffs, legal and jurisdictional measures, diplomatic isolation, and public/soft-power instruments to impose costs or offer inducements (外交部, 2023). The U.S. frequently seeks multilateral

backing for coercive measures (e.g., P5+1 diplomacy on Iran) because perceived legitimacy and coalition support increase leverage (Crystal, 2015). The effectiveness of U.S. coercive diplomacy has varied across cases and cannot be universally affirmed. Its success has historically depended on several critical factors: the credibility of threats issued by the U.S., the asymmetry of stakes where the target perceived the risk of unacceptable escalation, clearly defined and attainable objectives, the vulnerability of the target, robust multilateral backing, precise and timely communication (often involving time-sensitive pressure), and the presence of positive inducements to complement coercive measures (McCreedy, 2005). In practice, the U.S. has consistently maintained a dominant position when employing coercive diplomacy, owing to its overwhelming political, economic, and military superiority relative to other global actors. Historical scholarship has frequently cited the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 as a landmark example of successful American coercive diplomacy, wherein Washington secured a peaceful resolution that averted nuclear war through a calibrated mix of threats and negotiations (Crystal, 2015), coercive diplomacy combined with support from allies successfully persuading Libya to disarm (Romeo, 2016), and coercive diplomacy which had been instrumental in helping allies in Northeast Asia such as South Korea and Japan stand firm against North Korea's nuclear pressure (Brattström, 2007).

Previous scholarship had offered valuable insights into the definition of coercive diplomacy and examined how the U.S. had employed this strategy in past episodes of military tension. However, the twenty-first century, marked by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, presented a markedly different strategic landscape. Unlike earlier adversaries such as Iraq or Libya, the U.S. now faced a rising China, actively seeking to assert its claim to global preeminence. During Trump's first term, the U.S. launched a trade war aimed at curbing China's commercial capabilities. By the onset of Trump 2.0, this trade war had evolved into a full-spectrum confrontation, encompassing political, economic, technological, and military domains, with a central objective: to prevent China from catching up with America's technological achievements. What distinguishes this study from earlier works is its focus on how the U.S. has wielded coercive diplomacy in an international environment that increasingly values peace and no longer treats the use of force as a primary instrument of statecraft. In the past, whenever scholars referred to "American-style coercive diplomacy," they often assumed that the United States could resort to military force to compel other nations to conform to its will. The deployment of force to safeguard the Petrodollar system had stood as one of the most illustrative examples. Yet, as the military capabilities of other states had been consolidated, and as the second Trump Administration could no longer brazenly dispatch troops to intervene directly in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations, the United States had been compelled to devise more intricate mechanisms to exert influence on the global order. The new form of American "coercive diplomacy" had become closely intertwined with economic power. Whereas Europe had tended to interpret China's rise as peaceful, the United States had gradually reaffirmed its hegemonic position through a "peace without gunfire," relying solely on tariffs and economic sanctions.

Notably, 2025 marked the first year of the Trump 2.0 administration, offering a critical window for analyzing the contours of Trump's coercive diplomacy and projecting the likely trajectory of his foreign policy in the remaining years of his second term. The political, economic, and military stability of developing nations has also become increasingly contingent upon the direction of Trump's strategic choices. Known for his unpredictability, particularly in managing the complex U.S.–China relationship, Trump has continued to defy conventional diplomatic expectations. This study selected the topic of U.S. coercive diplomacy toward China in 2025 as a lens through which to examine how Trump operationalized this strategy and to identify the defining characteristics that emerged during the first nine months of his renewed presidency.

This study consists of five main sections. Section 1, Introduction and Literature Review, outlines the existing research trajectories explored by previous scholars and identifies the central focus of this study. Section 2, Theoretical Basis, defines the concept of coercive diplomacy as applied in this research, introduces the Truman Doctrine as a foundational framework for U.S. coercive diplomacy, and presents the notion of Trump's Transactional Diplomacy, which closely reflects the realities of the current U.S.–China strategic confrontation. Section 3, Methodology, details the two primary research methods employed: content analysis and event data analysis. Section 4, Results and Discussion, presents the key findings and interpretations offered by the research team. Finally, Section 5, Prospects of the U.S. Coercive Diplomacy, synthesizes the authors' projections regarding the future trajectory of American coercive diplomacy and its potential implications for the global market.

1. Research Background

Coercive diplomacy definition

Coercive diplomacy was a foreign policy approach that relied on diplomatic leverage, including threats of force, sanctions, or political isolation, to compel or prevent actions by another state. Unlike conventional military coercion,

coercive diplomacy prioritized diplomatic channels to achieve strategic objectives and treated armed conflict as a last resort. The effectiveness of this strategy depended heavily on credibility; calculated threats needed to convince the target that noncompliance would result in unacceptable costs, while still allowing room for de-escalation (DiploFoundation, 2025). As a nation that had not directly participated in either of the two World Wars in the twentieth century and had benefited significantly from arms sales to both the Axis and Allied powers, the U.S. steadily expanded its economic and military capabilities. This growing power base laid the foundation for Washington's deployment of coercive diplomacy in subsequent decades. Under the Trump 2.0 administration, that capacity was further amplified by rapid advancements in science and technology. Virtually any instrument, ranging from seemingly trivial tweets on social media to high-level economic and military agreements between the U.S. and its allies, could be employed by Trump to exert pressure on China's economy and security apparatus.

The Truman Doctrine (1947)

The Truman Doctrine, introduced in 1947, marked a pivotal turning point in U.S. foreign policy. It featured two defining elements: (1) the abandonment of the Monroe Doctrine's (1823) commitment to non-intervention in European affairs, and (2) the establishment of the principle of "collective security," which led to the creation of a network of allied and friendly nations receiving U.S. military assistance - most notably culminating in the founding of NATO (International Studies, 2015). This doctrine continued to shape the strategic outlook of successive U.S. presidents after Truman, serving as the foundation for America's global alliance architecture. While American leaders in the latter half of the twentieth century were primarily concerned with Soviet expansionism, the twenty-first century confronted President Trump with the rise of China as a global challenger. The Truman Doctrine was adopted as the theoretical backbone of this study because it underscored the U.S.' leadership role in global affairs and its commitment to building a robust alliance system. Throughout the twenty-first century, the doctrine remained resilient and evolved into a durable ideological stronghold, as Trump actively expanded America's global alliance network through the projection of U.S. political, economic, and military power. In an increasingly unstable and unpredictable world, scholars continued to observe echoes of a twenty-first-century Marshall Plan, as the U.S. entered into trade agreements and strategic partnerships with European nations, the United Kingdom, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and numerous other countries to safeguard its interests and reaffirm its global standing regarding to China. Trump fully embraced the notion that "America's national security is inseparable from global security," and even went so far as to declare himself "the president of Europe" in a symbolic effort to assert his leadership stature. In sum, although the Truman Doctrine had been formulated nearly seventy years earlier, it remained one of the cornerstone doctrines underpinning American foreign policy and the practice of U.S.-style coercive diplomacy in the contemporary era.

Trump's Transactional Diplomacy (2025)

Trump's transactional diplomacy was grounded in the logic of zero-sum game theory, emphasizing benefits exclusively for the U.S. and operating under a quid pro quo mindset. Within this framework, Trump demonstrated a willingness to employ deterrence and even hardline measures such as imposing tariffs on other countries - including U.S. allies (Agrawal, 2025) - effectively trading allied interests for gains favoring America. He treated international relations as commercial transactions and applied the same tactics he had used in the business world to the realm of global politics. During the U.S.–China Trade War 2.0, Trump threatened to impose heavier tariffs on countries that continued importing Chinese goods, a strategy that European Union members understood all too well. To Trump, everything was a tradable asset, and the U.S. was perpetually "taken advantage of." He consistently portrayed China as a cheater in the global trade narrative. Any form of cooperation, whether political, economic, or military, was negotiable, but such exchanges had to yield immediate returns for the U.S. During his visit to the Middle East in May 2025, one of the defining themes of his trip was "Commerce not chaos," underscoring the need for regional actors to engage in trade while minimizing disorder. In his strategy to deter China through military strength, Trump repeatedly urged U.S. allies to first reinforce their own defense capabilities by increasing military spending to 5% of their GDP. He argued that allies such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and NATO member states had long benefited from American military protection without contributing proportionately. European nations, in particular, were compelled to align with Trump's vision, which he claimed would help them achieve greater defense autonomy. In essence, political relationships during Trump's tenure bore the hallmarks of commercial exchanges, with national security at the core. Regardless of whether the counterpart was a partner or an ally, Trump expected them to contribute in proportion to what the U.S. offered. That was the *modus operandi* of Donald Trump.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research method with two analysis techniques: content analysis and event data analysis. The content analysis was originally used by churches in Sweden in the eighteenth century to understand the ideas in hymns. In 1927, Harold Lasswell was the first to develop this research method with the aim of understanding the implications of Nazi propaganda messages. Since then, in the 1920s and 1930s, this method was used to study the content of Hollywood films and then flourished with the advent of television in the 1950s (Macnamara, 2018). The author argued that this was an effective research approach to analyze situations and events in conjunction with the broader context in which the U.S. sought to assert its global position against its primary rival, China. The contents of meetings, documents, and agreements signed between the U.S. and its political, economic, and military allies were thoroughly examined to uncover the strategic implications behind those treaties and accords. The U.S. and the United Kingdom had signed a comprehensive agreement covering all sectors; however, without in-depth analysis and without situating it within the context of the intensifying U.S.–China competition in science and technology, researchers would have failed to recognize critical provisions related to artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and cybersecurity. Another illustrative example was the authorization granted to Nvidia and AMD to export chips to the Chinese market. Without rigorous scrutiny, this move might have been misinterpreted as a concession by the U.S. to China. In reality, 15% of the revenue generated from the Chinese market was required to be transferred to the U.S. government, and both corporations had to ensure the protection of intellectual property. These analyses could have contributed to affirming the strategic significance of the U.S.’ coercive diplomacy toward China in 2025.

The second method was event data analysis. The event data analysis method was first introduced in the 1960s by Charles McClelland, in response to the need among scholars of international politics to objectively quantify the levels of cooperation and conflict between states. The foundational research that preceded the development of this method could be categorized into two main strands. The first strand comprehensively examined the full spectrum of actions undertaken by both state and non-state actors in international relations, exemplified by Azar’s (1982) Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) and McClelland’s World Event/Interaction Survey (WEIS). The second strand concentrated on specific subsets within the broader domain of international relations, namely state behavior, foreign policy, and crises as in Hermann’s (1973) Comparative Research on the Events of Nations (CREON) and Leng’s (1987) Behavioral Correlates of War (BCOW). In this study, the author employed this methodology after compiling a comprehensive list of activities undertaken by the Trump 2.0 administration in implementing its coercive diplomacy strategy. Key events, official visits, and major initiatives of the Trump government were systematically cataloged and analyzed to uncover insights into the deterrent power of the U.S. and the strength of its alliance system. For instance, on the surface, the visit of a U.S. Senate delegation to the Taiwan Strait appeared to reinforce the “long-standing friendship” between Washington and Taipei, even as the U.S. reaffirmed its recognition of the “One China” policy. However, during that visit, both sides also referenced the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which aimed to further bolster Taiwan’s defensive capabilities and discussed future arms deals with the island. Although these developments stemmed from a single event, deeper analysis revealed underlying strategic implications. Taiwan had served as one of the most critical “living shields” for the U.S. in the Asia–Pacific region to counter China’s expansionism. The senators’ visit constituted a potent political and military deterrent signal from the U.S. to China, when viewed through the lens of coercive diplomacy.

Our research drew upon articles published in reputable U.S. outlets such as Politico, as well as sources from other countries including South Korea, Japan, several EU member states, the United Kingdom (Reuters), and India, to synthesize coverage of U.S. coercive diplomacy. The selected timeframe spanned from January 2025, when Trump assumed the presidency, to October 2025. All articles were publicly available, reflecting transparency in our data sourcing process.

3. Research Results and Discussion

3.1 The U.S. Coercive Diplomacy in Political Fields

The U.S. political power

One of the most commonly employed instruments in the U.S.’ coercive diplomacy strategy was political messaging – official statements from the White House and public remarks, including those made on social media, by President Donald Trump. This demonstrated that American political discourse had been broad in scope and targeted diverse audiences, portraying China as a political adversary to all information recipients and reaffirming the U.S.’ superior political standing on the global stage. To underscore America’s ability to influence Europe’s political, economic, and military affairs, President Trump once referred to himself as the “President of Europe” (Vinocur, 2025). His approach

to asserting U.S. dominance differed markedly from that of his predecessors, characterized by a more personal, assertive, and confrontational style. President Trump explicitly declared his intention to ban Chinese airlines from flying through Russian airspace, arguing that such routes reduced transportation costs and enabled Chinese goods to be priced more competitively than American products. Although global supply chains allowed countries to freely choose shipping routes, the U.S. planned to prohibit Chinese carriers from using Russian airspace. This constituted both a threat and a reaffirmation of the U.S.' political supremacy in comparison with its two principal rivals - China and Russia. Reinforcing America's political stature remained a consistent priority for President Trump. In mid-May 2025, amid concurrent global military and economic crises, Trump visited the Middle East and announced that the U.S. would address four major challenges: lifting sanctions on Syria, rescuing Israeli hostages, facilitating Russia-Ukraine negotiations, and issuing an ultimatum to Iran - positioning the U.S. as a stabilizing force in world affairs (Klein, 2025). These declarations not only reinforced America's global leadership but also served as a direct challenge to China's ambitions to supplant the U.S. China had actively sought to assume leadership roles in global affairs, such as mediating between Iran and Saudi Arabia and hosting the China-European Union Summit. Nevertheless, Trump's statements appeared to confront and undermine those ambitions. In practice, the Trump administration did not rely solely on coercive threats toward China; it also occasionally employed soft power through bilateral dialogues. During the height of the U.S.-China trade war in May 2025, President Trump expressed his willingness to meet President Xi Jinping in China, emphasizing that U.S.-China relations were pivotal to the evolving global balance of power (Woodhouse, 2025). This statement followed the inconclusive tariff negotiations held in Geneva on May 7, 2025. However, due to the U.S.' openness to dialogue, President Trump and President Xi conducted a phone call on June 5, 2025, and subsequently reached significant agreements during their meeting in London on June 10, 2025.

Although there had been periods of concession between the two sides, the U.S.' core strategic ideal remained the pursuit of strategic decoupling from China within the global value chain led by the U.S. This objective had been advanced through the use of tariff and non-tariff barriers, whereby the U.S. demanded greater openness from China toward American businesses, while simultaneously insisting on reducing dependence on strategic sectors such as steel, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals to safeguard domestic manufacturing interests (Cox, 2025). The predominant orientation of U.S. policy continued to be direct confrontation with China, employing coercive diplomacy to reaffirm America's superior global standing. In the context of U.S.-China trade relations, President Trump appeared to possess more leverage - often referred to as "Trump cards" - than his Chinese counterpart. Vice President J.D. Vance had made such a statement to assert that Trump's position remained unshakable, regardless of China's growing power. Vice President Vance's remarks were delivered in mid-October 2025, at a time when tariff tensions between the U.S. and China showed signs of further escalation. One of the most significant "Trump cards" held by the U.S. was Taiwan, which also represented the focal point of China's strongest objections to U.S. policy. Despite waves of protest from China, the U.S. and Taiwan continued to demonstrate a robust security partnership and conveyed a message of enduring friendship between Washington and Taipei. U.S.-Taiwan relations were further reinforced through a visit by a delegation of U.S. senators to Taipei in late August 2025, during which commitments were made to implement the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The U.S. pledged to continue adding provisions to enhance Taiwan's security in the event that China overstepped its bounds in the strait. In early June 2025, U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth was notably absent from the Ukraine Support Conference in Brussels, Belgium, choosing instead to focus on advancing the U.S. Asia strategy, where China's presence had become increasingly prominent. These political actions taken by President Trump and his administration clearly signaled a threat to China, both in terms of international positioning and the U.S.' capacity to defend its allies against mounting Chinese pressure.

The political voice of the U.S. allies

Supportive voices from political allies had been of critical importance to the U.S., as such endorsements enabled Washington to convey a clear message to China: that the U.S. possessed a vast and influential alliance network capable of shaping global affairs and effectively countering China's narrative on the international stage. European leaders consistently expressed support and admiration for President Trump and the accomplishments of the U.S. under his leadership. The British Ambassador to the U.S., Peter Mandelson, praised President Trump as "one of the most influential presidents in American history" and announced a bilateral automobile agreement that reduced tariffs for the United Kingdom from 27.5% to 10% (Olsen, 2025).

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte described President Trump as "a good friend" who had significantly influenced Europe's political and military landscape. NATO member states also aligned with Trump's call to increase defense spending and move toward greater autonomy in safeguarding their own security. In Washington,

in April 2025, President Trump and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni reached a consensus on the notion of “Western nationalism” and affirmed their shared objective of “making the West great again” (France 24, 2025). This marked a reaffirmation that the U.S.’ position in Europe remained unshakable. While China might have emerged as one of Europe’s major trade and investment partners, the political leadership and strategic influence in Europe remained firmly in American hands. Although no direct threat was issued, the implication for China was clear: Europe continued to fall under strong U.S. influence, and this trajectory was unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Beyond Europe, the U.S.’ political credibility was also strongly reinforced in Asia. The U.S. and Qatar reached a \$1.2 trillion agreement to expand comprehensive cooperation in energy efficiency, infrastructure, defense, and quantum technology. The U.S. also committed \$38 billion to upgrade the Al Udeid Air Base, marking a multi-sectoral strategic partnership between Washington and Doha (Asean Mekong, 2025). Furthermore, the U.S. and Iran reached an agreement on nuclear negotiations in mid-May 2025 during President Trump’s Middle East tour (Bloomberg, 2025). These diplomatic efforts were actively pursued by the U.S. to consolidate its position in the region. America’s political stature compelled various opposing parties in the Middle East to come to the negotiating table - something China had yet to achieve with its own diplomatic influence. It could be argued that countries aligning with U.S. leadership - such as those in Europe or parts of the Middle East - did so to secure political, economic, or security benefits in the face of looming global uncertainties. Conversely, the U.S. also reaped significant advantages by reaffirming its leadership role and demonstrating that it commanded a far more powerful alliance network than China in any prospective full-scale geopolitical confrontation.

3.2 The U.S. Coercive Diplomacy in Economic Fields

The U.S. coercive diplomacy based on its economic power

As the world’s leading economic superpower, the U.S. consistently sought to leverage its economic strength to advance coercive policies toward China, most notably through the trade war that erupted during both terms of President Trump.

The U.S. had unilaterally imposed tariffs on individual countries and territories engaged in trade with America, aiming to minimize China’s ability to access the U.S. market. China was labeled as the “world’s biggest cheater,” a designation affirmed by Peter Navarro, President Trump’s economic advisor (Zapata, 2025). Following the aggressive tariff measures, seventy countries immediately requested negotiations with the U.S. on April 7, 2025 (Liptak, 2025). Subsequently, on February 13, 2025, the White House announced that it was engaged in trade talks with 130 countries (Radford, 2025). In reality, this approach went beyond coercive diplomacy; it demonstrated America’s capacity for “preemptive strikes” against China to showcase its immense economic power. Prior to imposing tariffs on China and other nations, the U.S. had issued threats regarding the potential tax burdens China would face. During the second U.S.–China trade war in 2025, President Trump threatened to impose tariffs on China four times, with the most extreme proposed rate reaching 200% on August 26, 2025. However, the highest actual tariff rate applied was 145% on April 10, 2025 (China Briefing, 2025). These economic threats not only enabled the U.S. to secure additional trade agreements – up to 200 by the end of April 2025 – but also led to several tariff exemptions granted to China itself (Starcevic, 2025). Beyond economic gains, the U.S. also achieved greater political leverage than China in the lead-up to each meeting between President Trump and President Xi Jinping. President Trump consistently expressed optimism about the prospects for negotiation and the potential to secure favorable terms for the U.S. (David, 2025).

The U.S. not only asserted its superior position over China but also implemented economic deterrence measures targeting countries that intended to establish trade relations with China. In November 2024, upon winning his second term as President, Donald Trump had warned of imposing 100% tariffs on nations joining BRICS (McCarthy, 2025). The White House believed that the expansion of BRICS could threaten the U.S.-led global trade system and cause severe economic disruptions to global supply chains. In practice, Trump’s tariff policies yielded tangible political and economic benefits for the U.S. America’s global political standing remained intact, while tariff revenues surged. Politically, Trump claimed to have halted several conflicts through the sheer force of U.S. trade power, including the India–Pakistan dispute, and asserted that 200% tariffs served as a tool to compel restraint among nations (India Today, 2025). Economically, Trump declared that the European Union had paid \$950 billion, Japan approximately \$65 billion, and China even more, as a result of U.S. tariff policies (Eun-joong, 2025). American coercive diplomacy extended beyond tariff threats issued through White House statements or Trump’s social media; it materialized in concrete actions that demonstrated to China that the U.S. was a nation that “meant what it said.” For instance, the U.S. sanctioned two Chinese companies accused of purchasing chips for SMIC (Freifeld, 2025). When the U.S. imposed 100% tariffs on Chinese goods in October 2025, global stock markets were shaken, ushering in a new and more intense phase of the U.S.–China trade war.

Tariffs proved to be the Trump administration's fastest and most effective tool for issuing threats and launching "preemptive strikes" against China's economy. However, alongside tariffs, the administration also pursued non-tariff instruments as "weapons" of coercive diplomacy, targeting China's critical sectors such as mining and high technology. U.S. deterrence stemmed from its ability to enhance its own strength in advanced industries. The U.S. government reopened a rare earth mine in Wyoming – the first in nearly 70 years – with an estimated yield of 1.7 million tons, sufficient for the next 150 years (Madison, 2025). This move marked the first step in reducing America's dependence on Chinese rare earths, following China's weaponization of these natural resources. It also reflected Washington's strategic intent to decouple China from the global rare earth value chain, serving the broader goal of advancing AI development. Given that the AI race between the U.S. and China in the coming year could shape America's next century, the U.S. government moved swiftly to consolidate its AI capabilities (Kelly, 2025). President Trump's AI Action Plan, launched in 2025, represented one of the first major steps toward two core objectives: achieving AI self-sufficiency and curbing China's advancement in the field (The White House, 2025). The AI Action Plan clearly embodied these goals by promoting the export of comprehensive AI packages - including both hardware and software - to U.S. partners, fostering domestic innovation, and enabling AI development free from legal constraints. This was accompanied by the construction of the world's most advanced AI infrastructure (The White House, 2025).

The most prominent act of U.S. coercive diplomacy came through President Trump's meeting with the world's leading tech figures - Mark Zuckerberg, Tim Cook, Sam Altman, and Bill Gates - at the White House Rose Garden (The White House, 2025). The meeting not only shaped the future trajectory of American science and technology but also sent a clear message to China: the U.S. possessed a formidable talent pool in tech, and China could not catch up with America's scientific and technological progress. In addition to asserting its dominance in tech talent, the U.S. directly threatened China's technological advancement. The U.S. Congress reviewed a proposal to ban Chinese drones, a move that could severely impact the revenues of Chinese drone manufacturers and erode their market share in the U.S. (Wehner, 2025). Washington also considered restricting companies like Nvidia and AMD from selling chips to China to mitigate risks of intellectual property theft (Doherty, 2025). The U.S. was increasingly seen as having the upper hand in the chip race, with U.S. officials asserting that Chinese chips lagged one to two years behind their American counterparts. Nevertheless, these restrictive measures were not deemed excessive, as China was projected to close the gap in chip manufacturing. Coercive diplomacy remained one of the key instruments the U.S. employed to slow China's rapid technological rise (Reuters, 2025).

The U.S. coercive diplomacy based on its economic allies

The U.S. cooperated with its economic allies through the signing and negotiation of new trade agreements, the establishment of economic coalitions, or by threatening to form countervailing economic blocs aimed at China. The authors observed that the most critical objective of the U.S. in leveraging its allies within the framework of economic coercive diplomacy was to demonstrate that America possessed a robust network of economic partners that reinforced its economic power and sent a clear message to China: it should not confront the alliance system that the U.S. had built. America's alliance network spanned the globe, encompassing Asian countries such as India, South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines; Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia; European and African states; and countries across the Americas, including South America and Canada. It appeared that the U.S. had effectively encircled all potential pathways for China to establish its own economic alliances, thereby confining Beijing's options to a narrow scope. Following the tariff measures imposed by the Trump 2.0 administration, numerous countries around the world were compelled to enter negotiations with the U.S. to sign trade agreements and pursue comprehensive cooperation across sectors beyond economics, including politics, defense, and security. India was among the first nations to collaborate with the U.S. in constructing a new trade negotiation framework aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation and reducing dependence on Chinese goods (The Economic Times, 2025). In addition to the agreement to increase bilateral trade volume to \$500 billion by 2030, key American exports – such as steel, automotive components, and pharmaceuticals – were granted a 0% tariff rate upon entry into India. India was not the only country to approve tariff exemptions for U.S. goods; G7 nations also reached a consensus to exempt the U.S. from the global minimum tariff framework in order to mitigate tariff risks of up to 50% under the Trump administration (The White House, 2025). Given its strategic location adjacent to China's border, India's emergence as a major U.S. partner carried significant economic deterrence implications for Chinese goods, especially amid escalating tariff measures imposed by President Trump targeting China. In June 2025, the U.S. and India held direct negotiations on a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) aimed at reducing market access barriers between the two countries.

In its economic relations with Europe, the U.S. and the European Union reached a bilateral trade agreement (The White House, 2025) aimed at reducing the risk of escalation in the transatlantic trade war. As part of the agreement, the U.S. and EU established a Metals Alliance to protect the American steel industry and counter the influx of subsidized steel exports from China (Reuters, 2025). Additionally, the EU agreed to purchase \$750 billion worth of energy and semiconductor products from the U.S., thereby strengthening bilateral trade ties and preventing China from becoming a key trading partner of the European bloc (Jack, 2025). President Trump also urged the EU to impose a 100% tariff on Chinese goods to narrow the export market of this Asian power. It could be concluded that the EU served as one of the most critical allies in realizing the U.S.' coercive diplomacy strategy, while also reflecting Washington's determination to decouple China from the global value chain. Beyond the trade agreement with the EU, the U.S. also secured a comprehensive trade deal with the United Kingdom amid intensifying trade tensions. In May 2025, the U.S. and the UK signed the Economic Prosperity Deal (EPD), which included tariff reduction quotas for British automobile exports to the U.S. market, lowered tariffs on beef and aerospace goods, and introduced import-export quotas for ethanol between the two countries. By August 2025, President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed an additional "historic" agreement during Trump's visit to the United Kingdom. Under this accord, both nations committed to implementing \$42 billion worth of technology agreements covering artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and cybersecurity. The two sides also agreed to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030. For the U.S., strengthening its European allies was not only a means of reinforcing its own economic power but also a strategic move to counter China's global expansion.

The economic allies of the U.S. in Northeast Asia – namely South Korea and Japan – were also integral to Washington's strategy of deterrence and containment toward China. Following the imposition of tariff measures by President Trump, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung initiated a critical phone call that swiftly led to tariff reductions for South Korea. As a result, South Korean goods were subject to only a 15% tariff rate upon entering the U.S. market, significantly lower than the 25% rate applied to Japanese and EU goods (Hunnicut & Park, 2025). However, South Korea was also required to commit to a multi-year investment of \$350 billion and to purchase \$100 billion worth of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the U.S. Although Japan and the U.S. had not yet reached a formal trade agreement, Japan gradually moved toward greater autonomy in its economic and military strategies in response to President Trump's calls for self-reliance. Beyond major partners, the U.S. also reinforced its economic alliance network through meetings and negotiations with developing countries such as the Philippines and Scotland. President Trump hosted leaders from Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, and Senegal at the White House to promote trade over aid, and to negotiate on minerals, security, and immigration issues – aiming to counter Russian and Chinese influence in Africa.

These bilateral and multilateral engagements with economic allies were consistently directed toward enhancing U.S. national interests, reaffirming America's economic leadership, and threatening China through the collective strength of an alliance system built on U.S. economic power. The countries regarded as U.S. economic allies served as some of the most effective instruments for Washington to project economic dominance over China and to assert its coercive diplomatic posture in the bilateral relationship.

3.3 The U.S. Coercive Diplomacy in the Military Field

The U.S. coercive diplomacy based on the U.S. military power

In addition to being the world's leading economic power, the U.S. also possessed unmatched military strength compared to all other nations. This hard power was fully leveraged in its coercive diplomacy, as the U.S. did not hesitate to articulate its global military strategy. Washington declared the adoption of a "proactive deterrence" strategy toward all global flashpoints, including the Asia-Pacific region (U.S. Department of War, 2025). In addition to being the world's leading economic power, the U.S. also possessed unmatched military strength compared to all other nations. This hard power was fully leveraged in its coercive diplomacy, as the U.S. did not hesitate to articulate its global military strategy. Washington declared the adoption of a "proactive deterrence" strategy toward all global flashpoints, including the Asia-Pacific region. During the meeting, which gathered over 900 senior U.S. military officers, President Trump called on the armed forces to maintain a "warrior spirit" and announced plans to overhaul the entire Department of War (Quinn, 2025). The meeting served as a firm message from the U.S. that its military remained in a state of maximum combat readiness. Any foreign military force capable of threatening U.S. national security would be met with direct confrontation by the world's most powerful military. Indeed, the U.S. pledged to defend its core interests in the Asia-Pacific region at all costs, even though its stated policy was to avoid direct military confrontation with China. This represented a shrewd deterrence strategy – emphasizing that while the U.S. did not seek war, it would not abandon its vital interests in the region and would resort to military force if necessary to protect them. A notable example was the direct deployment of U.S. forces to the Panama Canal, one of the key

nodes in China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road strategy (Taipei Times, 2025). Furthermore, leveraging its military credibility and strength, President Trump had asserted that China would not take military action against Taiwan during his term in office (Reuters, 2025). The deterrent effect of America's pure military power made it increasingly difficult for China to resort to forceful measures in addressing regional disputes, compelling Beijing to prioritize dialogue instead. This could be regarded as a strategic success for the U.S. in employing military strength as an effective tool of coercive diplomacy.

Military deterrence did not arise spontaneously; it was the result of an accelerated process of next-generation weapons development by the U.S. Washington had publicly unveiled numerous advancements in defense science and technology, directly challenging the pace of military development by its primary rival, China. With a projected nuclear budget of approximately \$946 billion for the 2025–2034 period, an increase of 25% compared to the previous decade – the U.S. demonstrated its commitment to maintaining global leadership in nuclear security. The development of nuclear weapons served as a warning not only to China but also to other adversaries such as Russia and North Korea. U.S. military modernization consistently aligned with the phrase “surpassing China,” reflecting Washington's recognition that China was a capable contender for global leadership. The U.S. invested roughly \$500 million to accelerate the development of the F/A-XX stealth fighter, designed to extend operational range by 25% compared to the F-35C, enhance carrier-based combat capabilities, and effectively counter China's long-range missiles and aircraft (Global Defense News, 2025). In addition, the U.S. anticipated emergency scenarios in which China might provoke armed conflict, prompting calls to ramp up domestic production of missiles and drones, and to expedite its hypersonic missile program to reinforce its competitive edge over China and Russia. Washington also announced the “Golden Dome” project, aimed at developing a defense system against ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, and cruise missiles originating from China (Stone, 2025). On the maritime front, in response to mounting Chinese pressure in the Taiwan Strait, the U.S. advanced its submarine development program – alongside its allies – to ensure Taiwan's security and safeguard American strategic interests (Cherney *et al.* 2025). With a strategy centered on countering China's military rise, U.S. military power was reinforced daily. This constituted one of Washington's most forceful deterrent messages, intended to undermine China's strategic confidence.

The U.S. publicized its military achievements with a clear message: it was prepared to transfer these advanced systems to its Northeast Asian allies should China cross military thresholds – just as it had previously transferred technologies to Israel in the Middle Eastern theater. Given America's current military capabilities and the advanced support it offered, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan were positioned as reliable bulwarks capable of blocking Chinese military aggression. By declaring its possession of next-generation weapons systems, the U.S. not only issued a direct military threat to China but also signaled that its alliance network could be equipped with these assets – thereby amplifying the deterrent effect through collective strength.

The U.S. coercive diplomacy based on its military allies

The U.S. maintained a dense network of allies across Northeast Asia and the Asia–Pacific region, capable of effectively blocking all maritime access routes of the People's Liberation Army of China. Within a military pincer strategy, the U.S. and its allies intensified deterrence against China through a series of military alliances spanning the Pacific Ocean. Washington had directly reviewed the trilateral AUKUS pact with Australia and the United Kingdom to align it with the “America First” strategy in the Asia–Pacific (Stewart *et al.* 2025), including provisions for sailor training, technology transfer, and investment in submarine fleets. In mid-July 2025, the U.S., Japan, and Australia signed a trilateral naval logistics agreement to share fuel, missiles, and technology, and to enhance joint training and emergency response capabilities in the face of persistent threats from China and North Korea. This was not the first instance of U.S. cooperation with Northeast Asian countries such as Japan in 2025. In April 2025, the U.S., South Korea, and Japan held a virtual naval summit to strengthen trilateral cooperation and address threats from North Korea and China's “gray zone” activities in the East China Sea and South China Sea. Although not physically present in Northeast or Southeast Asia, President Trump positioned himself as one of the most influential figures in reinforcing regional security. His administration's deterrent posture extended beyond rhetoric at summits and was manifested through concrete actions, including the direct deployment of U.S. forces to Japan and South Korea, and the increased sale of arms to allies such as Taiwan. Given its strategic geopolitical location, Taiwan served as a key U.S. ally in countering China's expansion into the South China Sea, one of the most vital maritime transport corridors in the Asia–Pacific. While the Trump administration publicly affirmed its adherence to the “One China” policy, it simultaneously expanded arms sales to Taiwan under the banner of self-defense. By the end of May 2025, the U.S. had planned to increase arms exports to Taiwan beyond \$18.3 billion (Martina, 2025), to bolster the island's defense capabilities. The contracts included advanced missiles, ammunition, and unmanned

aerial vehicles. In practice, the U.S. utilized geographically proximate allies as “living shields” to contain China’s military expansion and to sustain its “proactive deterrence” posture directly on China’s doorstep.

Although the U.S. had maintained certain advantages over China in terms of military alliances, it did not allow these advantages to breed complacency. On the contrary, the U.S. and its military allies remained vigilant toward emerging partnerships between Beijing and other adversaries such as Moscow and Tehran. The trilateral coalition of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea jointly issued a warning regarding the threat posed by China, strongly condemning its “illegal maritime claims” in the South China Sea and its persistent use of gray-zone tactics in the region (Reuters, 2025). This warning was delivered on the sidelines of the 80th United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2025, signaling the concern of the U.S. and its military allies over China’s maritime expansion. It also served as a veiled threat, reminding China not to overstep boundaries in the region. Beyond the South China Sea, the U.S. extended its deterrent posture globally by issuing a joint warning with NATO regarding the emerging alliance among Beijing, Moscow, Pyongyang, and Tehran (Allison, 2025). The U.S. role within NATO remained irreplaceable, and the U.S.–NATO relationship stood at the core of Washington’s transatlantic military alliance strategy. The warning issued by NATO – America’s largest military ally – could be interpreted as a direct message to China, making clear that the U.S. and its allies were closely monitoring Beijing’s every move in forming strategic partnerships. Should China engage in military alliances that threatened U.S. security or global standing, the U.S. and its allies would respond accordingly.

To maintain a robust deterrence foundation through its alliance system, the U.S. consistently urged its partners to increase defense spending – both to reduce the fiscal burden on Washington and to encourage allies to build independent military capabilities. In response to President Donald Trump’s call, U.S. military allies held successive discussions with him regarding increased defense budgets. For President Trump, collective security could only be guaranteed if allies committed to higher defense expenditures. Japan emerged as a leading example, proposing a record defense budget of approximately \$60 billion for fiscal year 2026. This move reflected Tokyo’s determination to strengthen its military capabilities in the face of growing threats from China and North Korea. The U.S., in turn, benefited from Japan’s role as both a strategic ally and a buffer zone, helping to prevent direct military confrontation with China or North Korea. Also located in Northeast Asia, South Korea – another key U.S. ally – hosted President Trump in Washington in August 2025 for a summit addressing trade, semiconductor investment, energy cooperation, and notably, increased defense spending. At the time, the U.S. maintained approximately 28,500 troops stationed in South Korea, ready to respond to external security threats on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea’s commitment to boosting its defense budget further solidified the U.S.-led alliance network against China’s expanding military reach. As a vocal critic of the global military alignment among Beijing, Moscow, Pyongyang, and Tehran, European nations also supported President Trump’s call for increased defense spending. Leveraging trade incentives, Trump successfully pressured European countries to raise their military budgets (France 24, 2025). As a result, NATO – alongside the U.S. – continued to be reinforced as a strategic “shield” against China’s efforts to extend its military alliances on a global scale.

4. Discussions

Firstly, the U.S. had been facing one of the most formidable adversaries in its history since its founding, China. In response to a series of coercive actions initiated by the U.S. government, China had issued strong countermeasures, including conducting military exercises in the South China Sea; intensifying criticism of the U.S. at the WTO and rallying opposition to Washington’s unilateral trade war, which disrupted global value chains; expanding its military capabilities and announcing scientific advancements in defense; and strengthening cooperation across multiple domains with Russia, North Korea, Iran, and even certain European countries to assert its global standing. China’s internal strength in science and technology had grown steadily, with its arsenal of weapons and military equipment being reinforced, particularly through nuclear weapons cooperation agreements. China had also unveiled its AI+ initiative to directly counter President Trump’s AI Action Plan. During the second phase of the trade war, China retaliated with tariffs as high as 125%, inflicting significant damage on American exports. High-profile summits such as those hosted by BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were held with great fanfare, directly challenging the U.S.-led diplomatic forums. Rather than being deterred by American pressure, China responded with even greater momentum in scientific, technological, and military development. As such, the U.S. needed to reassess the effectiveness of its deterrence strategies toward China. In reality, China’s growing power had become the key factor driving Washington to continue its containment strategies

in the future. China's rapid advancement posed a serious challenge to America's status as the world's leading superpower and its influence on the global stage.

Secondly, Coercive diplomacy aimed at confronting China had emerged as one of the rare issues enjoying bipartisan consensus within the U.S. government. As a result, over the next three years of the Trump administration – and potentially into the subsequent presidential term – the U.S. was expected to continue threatening China across political, economic, and military domains. In response to China's rapid technological advancement, the U.S. closely scrutinized these developments and sought to assert its superiority by showcasing its own progress and global leadership. The ongoing U.S.– China confrontation had evolved into a comprehensive strategic rivalry. Although moments of apparent concession occurred such as negotiation rounds in Geneva and London or the phone call between President Trump and President Xi Jinping, these were merely temporary pauses rather than sustainable peace agreements. Furthermore, President Trump actively employed deterrent tools such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers to reinforce his position as the President of the world's leading superpower. In essence, without a full-scale confrontation with China, Trump would have struggled to define his presidential identity. Since taking office, countries including those in Europe, Japan, and China had been subjected to substantial tariff burdens - whereas previously, they had paid little to the U.S.. This served as a solid foundation for Trump's aspirations toward a future term in the White House.

Lastly, both the U.S. and China had engaged in strategic alliance-building to mitigate losses and reinforce their respective deterrence capacities in national security, economics, and politics. Consequently, developing countries needed to remain vigilant to avoid being drawn into the vortex of great-power rivalry. Choosing sides could result in diminished autonomy over domestic policy, economic strategy, foreign affairs, and defense. Moreover, the cycle of confrontation and retaliation between the U.S. and China had become a closed loop, propelling both nations' internal strength and technological development to levels far beyond the reach of developing economies. Neutrality was essential for countries like Vietnam to absorb lessons and benefit from technological transfers without compromising national security. Diversifying partnerships with other advanced economies also offered a pragmatic pathway for smaller nations to expand market access, reduce exposure to U.S. tariff scrutiny, and maintain stable trade volumes amid rising tensions. Domestically, the U.S. threat toward China, rooted in technological superiority across all sectors, could serve as a catalyst for developing countries to focus on strengthening their internal capacities, thereby avoiding becoming the next target of American deterrence

Conclusions and Further Research

The year 2025 marked the first year of Donald Trump's second presidential term. Containing China's extraordinary rise in economic strength, technological advancement, international political influence, and military capacity remained the foremost strategic priority of the Trump 2.0 administration. Among the array of available instruments, coercive diplomacy emerged as one of the most expedient and readily deployable tools for Trump and his inner circle. This study concentrated on analyzing the administration's coercive diplomatic strategies throughout 2025, aiming to depict the current global political landscape through the lens of U.S.– China relations and to forecast future geopolitical trajectories.

Leveraging its formidable political, economic, and military power, the United States exerted strategic threats against China through its own capabilities. Tariff impositions, sanctions targeting multinational corporations linked to China, and restrictions on Chinese imports into the U.S. market constituted direct coercive measures aimed at Beijing. Concurrently, Washington mobilized a broad coalition of allies across all three domains – political, economic, and defense – through a spectrum of tactics ranging from persuasion to compulsion. Tariffs, in particular, served as Trump's most potent instrument for alliance consolidation.

In essence, U.S. coercive diplomacy pursued three core objectives. First, it sought to reaffirm American primacy over China as a foundation for alliance-building and to constrain China's endogenous development. Second, it aimed to demonstrate the breadth of U.S. alliances in contrast to China's limited network, thereby encircling Beijing's pathways to global integration. Third, the Trump administration's coercive diplomacy extended beyond China, affecting U.S. allies across various regions.

This study distinguished itself from previous research by demonstrating that the new form of American "coercive diplomacy" no longer rested on sheer hard power but rather on soft power and economic leverage. Earlier studies had primarily examined the coercive dimension of U.S. policy through images of military deployments across the globe - such as in South Korea, Japan, Afghanistan - or through campaigns in Iran and Libya. By contrast, this paper analyzed the "coercive diplomacy" of the Trump 2.0 administration on the basis of content analysis and event data analysis. Through this methodological foundation, the authors gradually affirmed that

coercion was not confined to warfare but was embedded within Trump's very approach to governance and confrontation.

Furthermore, the authors asserted that the new "coercive diplomacy" was constructed upon the personal authority and credibility of the U.S. president. In this regard, we argued that the Trump Administration had been a government of considerable prestige and international standing, contrary to many claims that the United States had been in a weaker position in comparison with China. At present, and looking ahead, the authors contended that the United States would continue to occupy a superior position over China, owing to its substantial internal economic strength, its extensive network of allies worldwide, and, most importantly, its decisive geographical advantages. Consequently, American "coercive diplomacy" retained efficacy across numerous states, including China. Authors also examined Trump's coercive diplomacy through the prism of his personal traits and political style, thereby inferring the contours of U.S. foreign policy. The Trump Administration of 2025 represented a distinctive government in American history. Trump did not hesitate to assert himself both domestically and internationally, candidly addressing sensitive issues in foreign policy. Therefore, by grasping aspects of Trump's personality and political modus operandi, scholars could reasonably generate relatively accurate forecasts of U.S. foreign policy during the remaining years of his term.

The U.S.– China rivalry appeared destined to persist beyond Trump's tenure, becoming a structural feature of global politics. The more pressure the U.S. exerted, the more China accelerated its development, thus perpetuating a strategic feedback loop that would define the international order around the U.S.– China axis. Trump also appeared to leverage this confrontation to reinforce his leadership identity. Moreover, both powers actively sought to recruit developing nations as strategic allies. These states, however, needed to remain vigilant against the allure of either superpower. Aligning too closely with one side risked forfeiting autonomy in political, economic, and military domains.

The U.S.– China confrontation and Washington's coercive tactics opened new avenues for scholarly inquiry. Global political dynamics require continuous investigation and real-time updates in response to unfolding events. Given the rapid evolution of technology – arguably the most decisive weapon in this rivalry – geopolitical configurations were shifting at unprecedented speed. Technological dimensions thus warranted deeper exploration, potentially yielding policy recommendations for developing countries to narrow the gap with advanced economies. As potential swing actors in this great power contest, developing nations merited focused research, particularly regarding their strategic roles in the remaining half of this decade.

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Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Minh Trang Nguyen: Research question formation, Conceptualization, Theoretical basis, Writing – original draft, Review and Editing, Validation.

Quoc Dung Nguyen: Research question formation, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing – original manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

Although the authors used the Internet to collect the data, we declared that they have not used generative AI.

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