

MEMORANDUM

To: The U.S. President-elect
From: The Center for American Progress
Re: A Progressive China Policy

The choices you make as the next president will have a defining influence on the contours of U.S.-China relations and, ultimately, China's trajectory as a rising power.

Realizing the potential of the U.S.-China relationship, while guarding against future uncertainties, will constitute a central challenge of your presidency and of American foreign policy this century. Because China's future remains deeply uncertain, we can assume neither that the stability nor the prosperity that have generally characterized U.S.-China relations for the past several decades will continue, nor that conflict is inevitable.

As president, you will have to manage the many national security problems bequeathed to you by your predecessor, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, alongside a struggling global economy. But China's rise across nearly *every* dimension of power is a central strategic fact of the 21st century, and your choices will shape the geopolitical environment for a long time to come. While the United States cannot determine what path China takes, your administration can help create the global context for China's peaceful rise.

Getting China strategy right *from the beginning of your administration* will be critical to a successful U.S. policy on China. Presidents Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush all entered the White House in the wake of presidential campaigns replete with promises to be "tougher" on China—only to embrace a more pragmatic approach once the realities of the relationship became apparent. All three presidents lost valuable time and political capital.

Today, rapid changes to the global economy, the outsourcing and offshoring of U.S. jobs to China, and overall U.S. economic weakness combine to give unique momentum to the case that you, too, should take a "tougher" stance. To be sure, we have many serious policy differences with China—on human rights, currency exchange rates, and Sudan, to name a few. Yet the urgency of our shared challenges, most particularly on the need for dramatic reductions in global carbon emissions, but also on North Korea and other issues, requires a results-oriented strategy from the beginning.

Thus, you must reject the alarmism that frequently clouds policy debates on U.S.-China relations and take a clear-eyed, practical approach that does not see ruin or victory around every corner, but instead makes steady progress in advancing American interests. Our "risk management" approach to China outlined in this report focuses on real results by recognizing China's growing importance to global problem-solving. We need to engage China's leaders and the Chinese people in the urgent challenges of our time, including global warming. Without a serious commitment by the United States and China, humankind will not be able to avoid the most dire consequences of climate change. We cannot afford to continue with a reactive, piecemeal, and uncoordinated policy. Now is the time to embark upon a progressive strategy toward China.