

The Prospect of Shared Hegemony Between the US and China in Addressing Displacement

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2024/08/01/the-prospect-of-shared-hegemony-between-the-u-s-and-china-in-addressing-displacement/>

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This article is part of the US-China Dynamics series, edited by Muqtedar Khan, Jiwon Nam and Amara Galileo.

Forced displacement is an increasingly pervasive reality: as of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), forced migrants or forcibly displaced people include refugees, asylum-seekers, and other displaced individuals facing life-threatening circumstances—war, famine, natural disasters, persecution, political violence, and related conditions—that compel them to move either within or across borders (Migration Data Portal 2021; UNHCR 2020). While internally displaced people (IDPs) constituted most displaced individuals in 2020 (48 million), an additional 30.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers have potentially far-reaching consequences for individuals, countries of origin, and host countries (UNHCR 2020). Due to the ever-increasing magnitude of displacement, effective international responses are critical to the lives of displaced people, as well as the preservation of peace and security in the international system (UNHCR 2020). Thus, international organizations have underscored the need for multilateralism in dealing with displacement to craft meaningful and lasting solutions (UNHCR 2020).

Displacement is an issue that operates within a complex system in which the world's most powerful leaders, the U.S. and China, are forecasted to spar for influence through strategic rivalry as U.S.-led unipolarity dissipates (Ikenberry 2008). Scholars differ on whether shifting power relations will inevitably lead to strategic rivalry or if peaceful U.S.-China relations are possible (Ikenberry 2008). As U.S. power declines relative to China's, displacement may present a distinct site for either cooperation or competition between the countries as a collective challenge that affects virtually every region of the world: 68 percent of displaced people in 2020 came from Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNHCR 2020, 3). In evaluating global leadership on displacement—particularly through the international refugee regime—U.S.-China relations may indicate whether cooperation is likely, thereby forecasting the prospect for a U.S. grand strategy predicated on openness to shared hegemony with China.

Unlike areas of hard power, such as the military or economy, the issue area of displacement is a potential source of soft power, which can be a core instrument in a state's grand strategy (Martel 2015). Tied to international humanitarian norms, efforts to lead action on displacement may provide states with international recognition because it helps to resolve a shared problem among all states. As a collective problem, displacement (especially refugee crises) poses a threat to international stability which can infringe upon the international affairs of many states, particularly the U.S. and China. As the preeminent world leaders, both powers have a vested interest in upholding international (and regional) stability because their national interests span globally. While often overlooked as an area for cooperation, displacement is likely to be a policy space where the U.S. and China strive to mitigate it as part of their larger grand strategies, especially as displacement increases in scale. Even if the countries pursue grand strategies predicated on competition, they are more likely to cooperate in the non-competitive issue area of displacement overall to protect their interests and attain soft power benefits. The research questions guiding this analysis center on the prospect for shared hegemony: Are the U.S. and China likely to lead responses to

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displacement through cooperation or competition—or evade the problem entirely? Can these countries collectively offer a reprieve to displaced individuals, as well as sending and receiving countries, as part of a larger grand strategy of shared hegemony?

Literature Review

In assessing the respective roles of China and the U.S. in the issue area of displacement, it is key to examine the foreign policy actions taken by each state to derive conclusions regarding grand strategy. As Martel (2015) explains, grand strategy explains the *why* and foreign policy explains the *how* of state policies. Foreign policy thus accounts for the political, military, and economic actions taken in relation to other states while being grounded on long-term principles established by its grand strategy (Martel 2015). For a state to achieve its vision, these two components must be intertwined, otherwise, a state is likely to enact 'shifting, confused, and discordant policies' (Martel 2015, 5). Furthermore, grand strategies must be amended in response to substantive (external or internal) developments; amid China's rise, arguments concerning the need for a revised U.S. grand strategy have proliferated (Martel 2015). To forge a clear grand strategy, the U.S. must balance domestic and international factors, as well as the players and structures encapsulated within these realms (Martel 2015; Smith et al. 2016). Altogether, the shifting power dynamics in the international system underscore the need for an effective U.S. grand strategy that recognizes China's influence—the question of whether this should be cooperative or competitive persists.

Cooperation in the international system is inherently complex, especially when it involves a power dynamic modeling that of the U.S. and China. Keohane (1984) explains that cooperation tends to be measured by policy coordination between states who were not previously in harmony, making it highly calculated and reliant on concessions and negotiations. While these attributes may not typically be associated with a hegemon, 'hegemony depends on a certain kind of asymmetrical cooperation, which successful hegemons support and maintain' (Keohane 1984, 49). Some scholars even urge hegemons to alleviate 'the burden of hegemonic responsibility' through partnerships (Schweiss 2003, 211). 'Sharing hegemony' allows a collection of states to complement one another's distinct abilities to tackle a common problem, as applied to the issue of terrorism in the U.S. and European Union (Schweiss 2003). In the event of hegemonic decline, international regimes act as a mechanism for upholding cooperation across issue areas—even amidst shifting power relations and structures—through agreements that target collective problems (Keohane 1984). In the issue area of displacement, the international refugee regime is a site for cooperation among states, primarily through multilateral institutions like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Barnett 2002). This study applies the idea of shared hegemony to U.S.-China relations through the shared problem of displacement, with a specific focus on the international refugee regime.

Due to the enforcing power of states in the international refugee regime, countries differ in the burden-sharing they assume for refugees—states in the Global south often account for the place of origin and destination (Betts 2008). As of 2020, most refugees and other forcibly displaced peoples were hosted in Turkey, Colombia, Germany, Pakistan, Uganda, the U.S., Peru, Sudan, Lebanon, and Bangladesh (UNHCR 2020). While it is evident that a North-South divide exists in the global refugee regime, countries like the U.S. and Germany nonetheless host a large share of internationally displaced people. These trends call into question the reason why some states lead in resolving displacement, while others do not—the answer is likely related to soft power. States employ diplomatic, political, technological, economic, military, or soft power means to achieve their foreign policy goals; soft power relates to nonmaterial capabilities that states draw on to garner international influence (Martel 2015). Scholars, such as Joseph Nye, point to soft power as a means of securing a state's preferences without force, thereby deeming it a core element of grand strategy, especially for the U.S. (Martel 2015). Normative soft power relies more on a state's actions in following international norms and contributing to humanitarian efforts, while affective soft power centers on economic competitiveness, political stability, quality education systems, and related societal features (Smith et al. 2016). Both types of soft power may help a state exert influence over the international agenda and the decisions of international actors (Smith et al. 2016).

The international refugee regime clearly illustrates the role of soft power in the international system. For example, Turkey accepted a disproportionate number of refugees during the Syrian refugee crisis to bolster its regional and international standing (Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek 2015). However, the magnitude of the refugee crisis

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required it to amend its policies to preserve national interests and 'foreign policy priorities,' including its security and economy (Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek 2015). Similarly, the U.S. has held a prominent role in the global refugee regime since 1980 as a symbol of its national humanitarian values (Beers 2020). These examples illustrate how action in the international refugee regime constitutes foreign policy decision-making founded on political goals and considerations—yet, when ethics compete with national interests, states prioritize their interests (Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek 2015; Smith et al. 2016). U.S.-China relations in displacement, and more specifically, the international refugee regime, thus present an opportunity to evaluate cooperation and each state's respective soft power goals.

Expanding the Literature: China's Role in Displacement

The issue area of displacement, and its impact on the grand strategies of the U.S. and China, is often overlooked in IR literature. This is likely due in part to China's previous foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping centering on balancing a low profile with continued growth (Bader 2016). However, China's position under Xi Jinping has altered its foreign policy approach drastically; an evaluation of China under the scope of displacement highlights how it continues to reshape its foreign policy over time (Bader 2016). If, for example, China has pulled away from its historical support of sovereignty over human rights, it may indicate a grand strategy more attune to cooperation on non-competitive international issues like displacement (Wu 2009). Some scholars have remarked that China has taken a more proactive role in international humanitarian crises, but its preference for sovereignty seems unchanged in its discourse (Wu 2009). However, China's overall role in the issue area of displacement warrants closer analysis to evaluate the prospect for shared hegemony between the U.S. and China.

This analysis seeks to rectify the gap in the literature on U.S.-China relations in displacement by comparing each state's foreign policy actions on displacement. Given that the international refugee regime figures prominently in displacement and foreign policy generally, special attention will be given to China and U.S. decision-making in the regime to gauge global leadership. As Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek (2015) stress, the 'domestic policy dimension' underlying a state's refugee policies is critical because it is intermingled with international policy (207). Thus, the evaluation of each state's leadership in forced displacement articulates the domestic constraints faced by the U.S. and China before moving to their foreign policy actions. Ultimately, China's grand strategy has yet to be fully grasped, but some see it as seeking to overthrow U.S. power in the Asia-Pacific region, internationally, or both. Given the uncertainty associated with China's grand strategy, the need to analyze its foreign policy decisions (alongside those of the U.S.) through domestic and international politics is evident (Pearson 2010). By examining the approaches to displacement by each state, the future of global leadership—in displacement and beyond—may be assessed.

Looking Domestically: China's Internal Constraints

Achievements Through Rapid Urbanization in China

It is nearly impossible to circumvent domestic politics in discussions of grand strategy, as it implicates all facets of a state—domestic and international (Martel 2015). Even for China, domestic politics influence its foreign policy preferences (Pearson 2010). China's rapid urbanization affects its domestic sphere: in only a matter of decades, China transformed its agricultural-based economy into an urban model that gave rise to social and economic flourishing (Guan et al. 2018). From 1978 to 2015, the number of people in China's urban areas increased from 172.45 million to 771.16 million, whereas its rural population fell at an average rate of 5.05 million people each year (Guan et al. 2018, 98). Since 1978, China has benefited from urbanization in the form of economic expansion, leading its total GDP (\$11 trillion) to come second only to that of the U.S. (\$18.6 trillion) as of 2016 (Bader 2016; Guan et al. 2018, 98; Hamnett 2018, 229). Moreover, urban households experienced a massive expansion in their disposable income from 343 Yuan in 1978 to 31,790 Yuan in 2015 (Guan et al. 2018, 93). China's urbanization process has thus accomplished the very goals urbanization generally seeks to achieve: its 'economic structure, social structure, and spatial structure' underwent drastic changes that spurred economic growth and alleviated poverty in rural areas (Guan et al. 2018, 97). Furthermore, the efficiency of China's urbanization period has allowed it to bypass many of the problems experienced by other developing countries, making it an international model (Guan

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et al. 2018). China has even come to rival the most powerful country in the world economically and call into question the geographical future of the world economy (Guan et al. 2018; Hamnett 2018).

China's Practical Constraints in Displacement Leadership

The strides made by China in its economic, military, and political realms have garnered international attention (Bader 2016). Yet, China's urbanization has not been void of problems, which may ultimately present domestic constraints to the country's foreign policy and global leadership abilities (Bader 2016; Guan et al. 2018). China's urbanization model is predicated on high levels of energy and natural resource use, making its urbanization process 'unbalanced' due to quick-paced and large-scale growth (Bader 2016; Guan et al. 2018). As a result of China's rapid urbanization, the country's domestic constraints are extensive, especially when considering it has the largest population in the world with about 1.4 billion people (Bader 2016). Domestically, it struggles with supplying adequate employment, housing, healthcare, and transportation to those migrating to cities, meeting energy demands to sustain its consumption-based economy, population distribution and slowing population growth, environmental degradation, and more (Bader 2016). Of these issues, high resource consumption, environmental concerns, rural-urban inequalities, and migrant workers appear to pose the greatest threat to China's continued growth and domestic politics, which may have a bearing on its responses to international displacement.

Among the most prominent consequences of China's urbanization is its environmental footprint: as the world's largest shareholder in greenhouse gas emissions, China has been criticized heavily for its consumption habits (Bader 2016; Guan et al. 2018). China has outpaced other countries extensively in emissions because of its reliance on coal; however, China has become a leader in the development of green technology to alter these practices. Nonetheless, overturning these trends will prove exceptionally difficult, especially because its resource consumption is still growing despite international commitments like the Paris Climate Agreement (Guan et al. 2018). Between 1978 to 2000, China used 86.23 million tons of steel, 340.13 million tons of cement, and 1195.22 million tons of coal; China's resource consumption increased further from 2000 to 2015, leading it to use 386.26 million tons of steel, 1170.43 million tons of cement, and 2359.65 million tons of coal (Guan et al. 2018, 102). Not to mention, water scarcity is becoming pervasive in China, with over 400 cities unable to fully provide water resources to their residents (Guan et al. 2018, 102). Evidently, an urbanization model built upon 'high consumption, high emission, and high expansion' poses problems for long-term national growth (Guan et al. 2018, 103). Not only is China's sustained growth compromised by its urbanization model, but environmental repercussions challenge the government's ability to meet population demands.

Chinese cities bear the burden of air pollution, water pollution, and garbage pollution that reduce the quality of living for millions of people (Guan et al. 2018). Furthermore, China's rapid urbanization has led to the poor organization, or 'disordered spread,' of cities, which is consequently decreasing the amount and standard of agricultural land and giving rise to food insecurity concerns (Guan et al. 2018, 103). Beyond the environmental impacts of urbanization, China is also susceptible to climate change effects like sea-level rise, extreme weather events, droughts, and more. In 2020 alone, 5.1 million people in China were internally displaced due to natural disasters (Migration Data Portal 2021). Western China has especially been subjected to environmental pressure because of climate change—increased levels of poverty and migration have followed. For example, China's Urban Resettlement Model has encouraged internal migration from rural areas in Western China (the Sanjiang yuan region) to cities and towns to combat poverty induced by environmental degradation (Guo et al. 2020). The resettlement program attempts to enhance the livelihoods of rural residents while simultaneously alleviating the environmental pressures imposed on land resources inflicted by farming (Guo et al. 2020).

The Urban Resettlement Model and other resettlement projects illustrate China's proactiveness in mitigating domestic concerns through sustainable development, but it is confronted by other challenges related to internal migration (Guo et al. 2020). While urban resettlement is intended to disperse the benefits of urbanization throughout China's population, these goals are often illusive. This is especially true when it comes to China's migrant workers—227.5 million as of 2015—who are registered as urban residents but treated as 'second-class citizens' because they are neither part of the urban or rural population (Guan et al. 2018, 100). Not only does this discrepancy conflate the level of urbanization in China, but it reveals a significant gap in the distribution of resources among

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Chinese citizens, particularly in income (Guan et al. 2018). Furthermore, poverty is a prevailing problem: as of 2009, there were 50 million poor people in China's urban areas (Guan et al. 2018, 108). Inequality within cities is likely exacerbated by China's 'urban management system,' whereby cities within China are placed in a hierarchy that makes smaller cities subservient to larger cities (Guan et al. 2018, 104). The result of this system is that the 'superior cities' have more resources, whereas smaller cities do not, thus standards of living across urban areas are unequal (Guan et al. 2018, 104). Not only do rural and urban residents face inequality and other challenges, but migrant workers represent another ongoing issue in China's domestic realm.

China's Ideological Constraints in Displacement Leadership

The problems caused by rapid urbanization in China pose practical hindrances to its ability to lead on issues of displacement, especially for refugee resettlement. However, there is an ideological component to China's domestic politics that may consciously prevent it from taking an active role in refugee admissions. As Bader (2016) explains, a key facet of Xi Jinping's foreign policy approach is strengthening party-led ideology through the suppression of pluralism. The most resounding example of China's attempt to combat pluralism centers on Muslim and Christian minorities who have been impacted by 'anti-religious campaigns' (Wang 2021, 14). The Uyghur Muslim minority in China has garnered international concern due to the state's targeted actions, which include the incarceration of over one million people in political re-education camps, subjection to high surveillance, the destruction of mosques, and other efforts aimed at forcing the population to homogenize culturally and express government loyalty (Raza 2019; Wang 2021). Altogether, these events signal China's ideological resistance to accepting refugees domestically, especially when considering the mixed public opinion Chinese citizens have toward refugees because of poverty and remembrance of the one-child policy (Song 2018a). It further explains why China's legal framework lacks a refugee designation, a domestic body to determine refugee status, or guidance on applying for refugee status (Song 2018b). These domestic factors may explain why China has avoided leading in refugee resettlement efforts (Song 2018a).

Both practical and ideological constraints characterize China's domestic sphere. As a result of urbanization, environmental degradation and sustained economic growth are major drivers of the state's domestic policies. It is notable, however, that China has invoked internal migration as a means of overcoming its domestic challenges, while it simultaneously faces issues of equality across its population, especially for migrant workers. Although China's domestic constraints may limit its capacity to resettle refugees or other displaced persons, its foreign policy actions must also be analyzed to fully grasp China's role in displacement.

Looking Internationally: China's Foreign Policy on Displacement

The international refugee regime most clearly shows China's foreign policy actions, while simultaneously revealing the extent of its multilateral cooperation on displacement. It is important to note that China has only recently transitioned from a refugee-producing country to a destination country for refugees (Song 2018b). In 2020, China was a host country to 304,000 refugees, while also the country of origin for 213,220 (Migration Policy Institute 2021). While the difference between the number of refugees produced and received by China is narrow, it signals changing dynamics within the international refugee regime. This is furthered by China's increasing leadership and cooperation in multilateral agreements aimed at enhancing the rights of refugees and migrants. In 2018, China joined The Global Compact on Refugees (Refugee Compact) and The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Migration Compact) (McAdam 2018). The Refugee Compact stressed the need for responsibility-sharing among states in refugee crises to better prevent and resolve displacement (McAdam 2018). The Migration Compact, while focusing on broad-scale migration rather than displacement specifically, was endorsed by China, but not the U.S. or Australia (McAdam 2018). The developments imply that China's role in tackling displacement is increasing, at least through multilateral means of cooperation.

China has not only bolstered its commitment to displacement efforts through agreements, but it has illustrated a stronger role in resolving prevailing crises. For example, China stepped away from its historical preference for non-interference to willingly play a mediating role between Bangladesh and Myanmar in the Rohingya refugee crisis, which led to a meeting between the countries and the United Nations in 2018 (Song 2018a, 689). China also sought to address the needs of Rohingya refugees by providing the population with humanitarian assistance (Song 2018a).

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Of course, it is important to note that Myanmar shares a border with China, which may signal China's efforts to resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis stemmed more from concerns of regional instability than a desire to help refugees (Song 2018a). However, China's foreign policy approach to displacement nevertheless indicates a more proactive role in protecting refugees through aid and investment in development projects vis-à-vis international organizations (Song 2018a). China pledged \$1 billion (USD) to international organizations for 'refugee-related projects in Asia and Africa' that target 'the root causes of displacement,' like poverty and underdevelopment, at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Song 2018a, 687; Song 2018b, 159). Given China's focus on helping to fund development projects, rather than refugee resettlement, its approach to refugee issues clearly differs from the U.S. and other Western countries (Song 2018a).

Looking Domestically: U.S. Internal Constraints

America's Ideological Constraints in Displacement Leadership

The U.S. faces prominent domestic constraints that may affect its ability to lead global displacement efforts, particularly public opinion on immigration. As one of the most polarizing issues in American culture, public opinion is very likely to sway domestic politics undergirding foreign policy decisions on displacement in the country's long-term future. While immigration includes both voluntary and forced migration, the measures pursued during the Trump administration illustrate how anti-immigration attitudes translate to policies toward forcibly displaced people, especially refugees. This fact is most clearly illustrated through the Trump administration's lowering of the refugee admissions ceiling to unprecedented levels, moving from 110,000 during the last fiscal year (FY) of Obama's administration to 50,000 (FY 2017), 45,000 (FY 2018), 30,000 (FY 2019), 18,000 (FY2020), and 15,000 (FY 2021) (Mathema and Carratala 2020; Rush 2020). This trend may signal an alteration in U.S. leadership within the international refugee regime, or at least highlight the reality that domestic challenges to refugee protection are prevalent.

Overall, the decision to cap refugee admissions aligned with Trump's larger anti-immigration agenda, which sought to limit Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for multiple countries, halt the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, ban entrance of nationals from several Muslim-majority countries, and impose other regulations to slow and limit immigration to the U.S. altogether. Since Trump's actions were largely enacted through executive order—and refugee admissions are always set through presidential determination—the party in power has significant influence over the U.S.' foreign policy actions toward displacement, particularly refugee resettlement (Beers 2020). The polarization apparent in U.S. views toward immigration by Democrats and Republicans could forecast notable constraints on the country's ability to lead on international displacement, or at the very least, imply a highly volatile role for the U.S. depending upon which party holds executive power. The American public is further divided on refugee protections: 51 percent of Americans favored refugee admissions in 2018, but over 74 percent of this group were Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (Krogstad 2019). Altogether, these policies exemplify the constraints on international displacement that are fueled by contentious domestic politics in the U.S. Despite these challenges—that much like China, reflect ideological constraints—the country must increasingly grapple with practical problems.

America's Practical Constraints to Displacement Leadership

While developed nations typically have the most resources and capacity to cope with climate change, its impacts will not bypass the U.S. Internal migration by firms and households has been—and is likely to be—a central adaptive response to climate change (Partridge et al. 2017). As average temperatures in the country rise, perhaps as much as 8.5 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit, migration within the U.S. is likely for many people seeking to reduce the costs of climate change (Partridge et al. 2017, 451). Natural disasters in the U.S. are also likely to trigger movement, as shown by the 1.7 million people internally displaced within the country in 2020 (Migration Data Portal 2021). When considering the capacity for the U.S. to navigate displacement in other countries, it is evident that it must also balance displacement (and migration at large) within its borders, especially as climate change effects worsen.

Looking Internationally: America's Foreign Policy on Displacement

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The domestic politics of immigration figure prominently into U.S. leadership capabilities in displacement, as do its foreign policy actions. While Trump's anti-immigration agenda lowered the refugee admission ceiling (and thus, the numbers of refugees admitted) from 2017 to 2020, it deviated from the U.S.' historic leadership within the international refugee regime. In fact, the U.S. assumed its leadership role in the regime after World War II before it even officially adopted a permanent law on refugee resettlement in accordance with international law through the Refugee Act of 1980 (Martin and Ferris 2017, 20). Since then, the U.S. has propagated the refugee regime 'as a donor and as a recipient of refugees' by providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced people in other countries, while also resettling refugees and asylum-seekers in the U.S. (Martin and Ferris 2017, 23). Acting as the preeminent donor in the international system, the U.S. funnels monetary contributions into international organizations, like UNHCR and IOM, to support both refugees and IDPs (Martin and Ferris 2017). Through its aid contributions, the U.S. has maintained significant authority in the humanitarian organizations that spearhead displacement responses (Martin and Ferris 2017).

Refugee resettlement has been a second core element in the U.S.'s foreign policy approach to displacement: according to the U.S. Department of State, over 3.1 million refugees have resettled in the U.S. since 1980. Thus, the policy decisions made under Trump deviated significantly from typical U.S. resettlement trends. Admissions remained at an average level of about 70,000 refugees per year before Trump's presidency—during his tenure, admissions numbers fell as low as 11,814 (Martin and Ferris 2017; Migration Policy Institute 2021). To reclaim U.S. leadership in the international refugee regime, the Biden administration reversed Trump-era policies by raising the cap on the refugee admissions ceiling to 62,500 (FY 2021) and 125,000 (FY 2022) (Migration Policy Institute 2021). However, even after raising the admissions ceiling in 2021, refugee admissions fell further to 11,411 under the Biden administration (Migration Policy Institute 2021). The administration has attributed this inconsistency to persistent problems fueled by Trump's policies to reduce refugee resettlement, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. This justification aligns with Beers' (2020) argument that long-standing barriers to resettlement are likely to persist even after Trump's anti-refugee policies due to the destruction they incited. Given these realities, the raising of the refugee admissions ceiling to its highest number since 1993 signals the U.S. government's intentions to reaffirm its long-standing (bipartisan) norm of humanitarianism (Beers 2020; Migration Policy Institute 2021). These foreign policy moves illustrate that the U.S. is avidly attempting to regain its leadership role in the international refugee regime and recapture its broader global standing (Beers 2020).

Conclusion

China and the U.S. likely recognize that large-scale humanitarian issues cannot be resolved unilaterally, especially as the domestic and international politics of both states impose constraints on displacement leadership. On the part of China, pronounced practical and ideological constraints exist, including high energy and resource consumption, environmental concerns, rural-urban inequalities, migrant workers, and state resistance to pluralism. Alternatively, the U.S. divide on immigration issues straggles party lines and threatens its leadership on refugee resettlement, in addition to climate-related challenges.

China and the U.S. have exhibited foreign policy decisions that signal a willingness to engage in cooperation, or at least peaceful competition, within the issue area of displacement. China's previous inclination for state sovereignty over human rights remains prevalent, but it has increasingly undertaken leadership roles in the international refugee regime. However, China's leadership has diverged from actions by the U.S. and other Western states by pursuing development projects to alleviate poverty and other drivers of displacement. Drawing on this indicator, international organizations have implied that China could meaningfully contribute to refugee protection through 'development-oriented approaches' that align with the country's preference (Song 2018a, 689). Despite challenges to U.S. leadership in the international refugee regime under the Trump administration, the country appears to be maintaining its aid contributions to refugees and IDPs, while bolstering its refugee resettlement capacities. These trends imply that while the U.S. may lead, there is space for China to bear a revised role for the benefit of the international community.

The Prospect of Shared Hegemony in Collective Humanitarian Problems

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While U.S.-China relations may be contentious in the international system, the non-competitive issue area of displacement presents an avenue for cooperation. As emphasized in this analysis, the U.S. and China have strengths and weaknesses that make each country adept in displacement-relevant areas, including development, aid, and refugee resettlement. By pursuing different efforts to protect those forcibly displaced, shared hegemony in displacement may be possible. Not only is cooperation in the best interest of displaced people, countries of origin, host countries, and the international system, but it is in the interest of the U.S. and China. As the U.S. seeks to recapture its normative soft power by reverting to its former humanitarian commitments, China may be able to gain soft power by increasing its displacement efforts. Ultimately, however, China's actions within displacement are still emerging, whereas the U.S. is recovering from an explicitly anti-refugee era. Thus, while cooperation—or the opportunity for it—seems to exist, it may be too early to accurately gauge whether cooperation will be sustained. Yet, given the magnitude of displacement, there is hope that the U.S. and China can peacefully unite in this shared humanitarian challenge.

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