it will be essential to demonstrate that the United States has a plan to manage and defuse the risks of such a strategy. Thus far, the administration seems primarily concerned with improving its competitive edge. It will need to balance this with tangible efforts to build confidence-building mechanisms that can release some of the pressure on the military-to-military side. At the end of the day, maintaining the U.S. military edge is a necessary, but insufficient, aim. The administration will also need to reassure partners that its aim is *collective* security and not simply creating security for "America first".

Conclusion

Two years after President Trump's elections, most of the worst fears about what a Trump presidency might mean for Asia have not been realised. The United States remains engaged in the region, focused on maintaining alliance relationships, and committed to creating greater freedom and openness.

But the administration's shift toward a more openly competitive U.S.-China relationship suggests that U.S. strategy may be on the precipice of a significant, and potentially longer-term, realignment. The administration's rhetoric should not be written off as mere political posturing. It reflects deeper fissures in the bilateral consensus about how to manage U.S.-China relations that have been growing for the past few years. How and where the tectonic plates eventually resettle remains to be seen. But what will be essential to remember in navigating what is likely to be a period of more rocky years ahead, is that competing with China, much like cooperating with China, is merely a means to an end. The aim is a free and open Indo-Pacific; competition is only meaningful if it brings about that goal.

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