



Don't Play Partisan Games With China Policy

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It is rare in American politics for citizens of different viewpoints to focus on the same thing at the same time. Our partisan media ecosystem makes it easy for us to remain safely within our personally curated information bubble—having our preexisting biases and perceptions repeatedly reaffirmed.

Sometimes, however, something happens that calls us all to the table. This time, it was China's high-altitude surveillance balloon, which entered U.S. airspace on January 28 and flew over at least nine states before it was shot down off the South Carolina coast on February 4.

Americans of all political stripes oppose foreign espionage, and over the last five years have come to increasingly dislike and distrust Beijing. In 2017, according to Pew Research, Americans were roughly split in their views of China; by 2022, 82 percent of Americans held an "unfavorable" view of the country and only 16 percent had a "favorable" view—and that was before the balloon arrived.

Yet to listen to members of Congress and the administration during the balloon incident, you would never guess that the American public—Democrats, Republicans, and independents—is in agreement on China policy.

Some Republicans quickly took the discussion from a reasonable policy debate to personal and partisan attacks on the president. Rep. Andy Biggs (R-Az.) ripped into "Beijing Biden," while Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) insinuated that the Biden family's business interests in China influenced the president's response. Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.) questioned his allegiance to the United States, while Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) walked the halls of the Capitol holding a white balloon and screamed at administration officials in a classified briefing. "From flying balloons to open borders," Texas Governor Greg Abbott thundered, "Biden has no regard for our national security and sovereignty."

Rather than responding with transparency, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby made matters worse by trying to shift blame to the Trump administration for failing to track similar balloons from China. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer was also quick to dismiss reasonable concerns about where the balloon was taken down as "highly political." Indeed, both Republicans and Democrats have legitimate questions about why President Joe Biden waited to shoot down the balloon until after it had traversed the United States, especially given credible reporting that the White House may have delayed to avoid irritating Beijing.

More broadly, though, ad hominem attacks and blame deflection inject poisonous partisanship into our China policy at a time when more responsible members—Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wisc.) and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.)—have established a new committee specifically to advance bipartisan cooperation to counter the threat. Especially at this moment, just as the committee is staffing up, questioning the president's loyalty and using minor policy differences to score petty political points harms our nation's ability to respond to Beijing with one voice—which is what Americans want and what the new China committee was formed to do.

Americans must come together on China. Carelessly accusing the president of being Beijing's stooge is both unserious and short-sighted. And it is irresponsible to deflect blame to a past administration while downplaying valid security concerns. Now is the time for congressional leadership on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers to spread the word to each and every member that China is different. The threat Beijing poses requires legislators to step up, put their personal interests on hold, and come together to address this national challenge. Such conversations can be held quietly, but they must be held.

If not, the country will pay the price as Beijing continues to find ways to exploit our partisan divisions for its own strategic advantage. Indeed, it already has; China's propaganda outlets have compared the January 6 violent mob to student protestors in Hong Kong, and cited America's history of slavery to deflect from their ongoing genocide of Uyghur Muslims. Some members of Congress have parroted China's talking points, which only further divide our country just when we need all hands on deck. As Benjamin Franklin reminded his colleagues at the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly, we will all hang separately."

Michael Sobolik is Fellow in Indo-Pacific Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, D.C. Follow him on Twitter @michaelsobolik. Joshua Eisenman is Senior Fellow for China Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council. Follow him on Twitter @Joshua_Eisenman.

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