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Giant Leap for Mankind: The Case for Space Cooperation

In April 2011, Congress passed an amendment to the budget of NASA (National Aeronautics & Space Administration) banning them from cooperating with China on any project. China has invited the US to participate in cooperative space projects, but by law NASA cannot accept. This case argues that fear and loathing of China needs to calm down, and that the benefits of cooperation in space with China would far exceed the risks.

Fear of China stealing our technology or hurting us in some way has to be balanced against the improvement in relations we would gain by cooperating instead of antagonizing them. Joint projects in space reduce the incentives China would have to attack the US in space, since they would be hurting themselves if they did. And working with China would give us better intelligence on exactly what they’re up to, a strategic advantage that would improve our security.

We could also accomplish more in space by cooperating. Space exploration is expensive, and it’s unlikely that any nation, even ours, could accomplish much in space without partners willing to fund some of the effort and share the workload. We could develop new technologies that could benefit all mankind and find new approaches to cleaning up space debris, a major threat to the future of space travel and the commercial exploitation of the near reaches of space.

Negatives will argue that it’s all risk and no benefit. Chinese space technology is far behind ours, so we have nothing to gain. And we have everything to lose if our technology leaks to them and they use it against us to win battles in space that knock out key infrastructure needed by our forces on the ground. The Negative strategy also comes with an optional counterplan, arguing that instead of cooperating with China we should increase funding for anti-China countermeasures in space and increased cooperation with our own allies to form a tighter coalition against China in space.

Control Freaks: The Case for Relaxing Export Controls

Cold War era restrictions on the export of high-technology items were originally intended to improve America's security by avoiding technological assistance to our real or potential enemies. These restrictions, known as “export controls,” block the export of certain items, many of which are not weapons at all, to countries that are potentially threatening to the US. China is one of the biggest targets of our export controls.

This case argues that US companies are unfairly disadvantaged in world markets because they can’t sell things to China that other advanced countries, like Britain and France, can sell them. Since China will get the same things no matter what, strict export controls don’t make sense except in a very few limited cases. Most of the time we are merely punishing ourselves, not harming China in any way.

Export controls are directed at items often referred to as “dual use” items. These are products that are not specifically military items nor weapons themselves, but which could conceivably be used to enhance the target country’s military capabilities. Before exporting such items or sharing such technology with China, US companies must apply for and receive permission from the US federal government. For example, a US company recently tried to export a large supercomputer to China, but the government stopped the export under the “dual use” export control rules.

Negatives will argue that export controls serve a valuable purpose in denying an adversarial country the capability to enhance their military capabilities and potentially use our own technology against us in some future conflict. If export controls have no effect on China’s ability to procure foreign technology, a Negative would ask, then why does China so frequently complain about the export controls? Why would they matter if China was successfully bypassing them all the time?

Negatives will also argue that the actual percentage and dollar value of trade denied by export controls is already minimal. Maybe export controls denied a lot of trade 20 years ago, but things have changed since then. Reforms are already underway and the problem has mostly been solved.

Here Comes the Sun: The Case for Ending Tariffs on Chinese Solar Energy Equipment

China is a big producer and exporter of solar energy panels. Many of those panels are intended for export to the United States. But the US government has imposed high tariff rates on Chinese solar equipment, responding to a complaint by a German company operating a solar panel manufacturing plant in the US. Their complaint is that China is subsidizing the solar industry, allowing Chinese panels to be exported to the US and sold for less than it costs to make them. The tariffs raise the price of the Chinese panels significantly.

The problem with this is that raising prices of the equipment needed to make solar energy affordable and widespread in America is a really bad policy. It slows the growth of solar energy, meaning we rely more on air polluting sources of energy instead. And for the few jobs we protect in the US solar manufacturing industry, we lose many more jobs that could be active in solar installation and maintenance businesses, since they are not installing all those cheap Chinese panels that people could have been buying. Consumers lose, installation businesses lose, and the environment loses. The Affirmative plan solves by lifting the tariffs.

Negatives will argue that the tariffs are not that big an impact on the price and are amply justified by Chinese government behavior. Demand for solar panels in the US is at an all time high, so it doesn’t seem to be hurting anything. Jobs in the US manufacturing sector are worth saving, and we need to take a stand against Chinese violations of trade rules.