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Opinion

# Beijing set out to destroy U.S. economic supremacy. It's nearing its target.

The U.S. must not be complacent about the most advanced adversary we have ever faced.

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An employee works on solar photovoltaic modules for export at a factory in Sihong, in eastern China, on Sept. 3. (AFP/Getty Images)

By Marco Rubio

*Marco Rubio, a Republican, represents Florida in the U.S. Senate.*

The release of “Made in China 2025” changed the world — literally. For decades, the Chinese Communist Party “hid its strength and bided its time,” and the United States welcomed China’s rise as an expedient boon to the global economy. But in May 2015, Beijing went public with a 10-year plan to dominate high-value, high-tech industries — with the manufacturing sector of

decades, the Chinese Communist Party “hid its strength and bided its time,” and the United States welcomed China’s rise as an expedient boon to the global economy. But in May 2015, Beijing went public with a 10-year plan to dominate high-value, high-technology sectors — with the unspoken goal of destroying America’s economic supremacy. Few recognized it at the time, but the plan would change the world’s reigning and ascendant superpowers from genial business partners to bitter adversaries.

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In 2019, my [Senate office released](#) “Made in China 2025 and the Future of American Industry,” a report that analyzed Beijing’s plan and spelled out the threats it posed to U.S. security and prosperity. Five years later, with the decade reaching its close, we have taken stock of China’s progress. The takeaway from our new report: “China has reached, or is near to reaching, the technological cutting edge in most of the sectors it has targeted.”

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“[Made in China 2025](#)” tasked the Chinese state-industrial complex with “enter[ing] ... the ranks of the manufacturing powerhouses” in 10 key fields. Of those 10, China is now the world leader in four. It exports [more electric vehicles](#) — and [more cars generally](#) — than any other country. It controls more than 80 percent of the [global solar power supply chain](#) and has completed the world’s

emerging in the ranks of the manufacturing powerhouses. In 10 key fields, of those 10, China is now the world leader in four. It exports more electric vehicles — and more cars generally — than any other country. It controls more than 80 percent of the global solar power supply chain and has completed the world's first fourth-generation nuclear reactor. In high-speed rail, China boasts an astonishing 28,000 miles of track. Even more astonishing is China's shipbuilding capacity, which — the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence reports — exceeds America's by a factor of more than 200.

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In five more fields, Beijing's industrial policy has underperformed its targets, but by minimal margins. The Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China is a disappointment, but China's space sector can compete with America's and Russia's. Chinese drone makers have captured an estimated 70 percent of the industrial U.S. market. Chinese biotech companies, though they remain heavily dependent on Western capital, technology and talent, are producing novel drugs and therapies. China's new materials research and development base is vast, if unexceptional, and in robotics, Chinese firms are steadily encroaching on international firms' domestic market shares. Finally, Beijing's microchip manufacturers are standing strong amid U.S. export controls and are achieving a dominant position in the production of so-called legacy chips.

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China’s agricultural sector, by contrast, has not reached the benchmarks set out in 2015. In fact, China’s agricultural trade deficit has significantly increased, presenting a tremendous obstacle to the Chinese Communist Party’s drive for economic independence from the outside world. But aside from this failure, any reasonable measure would deem Beijing’s 10-year plan a success. Gone are the days when China was just the world’s factory of low-quality goods. Today, it is a force to be reckoned with in the industries that will define the 21st century.

Some commentators will dismiss this message because it cuts against the grain of a popular narrative that China’s economy is on the brink of collapse — a narrative President Joe Biden expressed in his June interview with Time: “You’ve got [in China] a population that’s considerably older than the vast majority of the youth in Europe, that is too old to work. And they are xenophobic. ... Where is it going to grow?” China’s demographic outlook truly is dim, and much of the country’s economic strength is sustained by debt, which exceeds its gross domestic product by more than 180 percent. It may well be that Beijing will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, as Moscow collapsed in 1989.

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But we should not assume that outcome. It may well be that Beijing will continue to advance. After all, it has economic and technological advantages the Soviet Union never dreamed of. And even if we are confident China will cease posing a threat in the future, that does nothing to answer the threat it poses today. The bottom line is that U.S. policymakers cannot afford to be complacent about the largest, most advanced adversary America has ever faced. That was true in 2015, and it will be even truer in 2025. To prevent China from eclipsing the United States entirely in the decade that follows, we need an industrial policy of our own.

This will require dramatic investment in sectors critical to our security and prosperity. It will require similarly dramatic deregulation to energize our stifled and sclerotic manufacturing environment. It will require tariffs, technology transfer restrictions and other trade barriers to keep subsidized Chinese products at bay and account for Chinese corporations setting up shop in third



prosperity. It will require similarly dramatic deregulation to energize our stunted and sclerotic manufacturing environment. It will require tariffs, technology transfer restrictions and other trade barriers to keep subsidized Chinese products at bay and account for Chinese corporations setting up shop in third countries. Last, but not least, it will require a stronger shield against Chinese espionage and intellectual property theft.

Countering Beijing’s strategy does not mean adopting Beijing’s methods. This is not a call to nationalize key companies, erase the distinction between public and private industries, or harness forced labor for material gain. It is simply a call to return to America’s roots of supporting critical industries, both proven and promising. We must read the writing on the wall — which China’s regime has conveniently spelled out for us — and respond. If we fail to do so, despite bipartisan agreement on the need to increase America’s competitiveness, we will have learned nothing from “Made in China 2025.”

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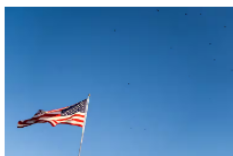
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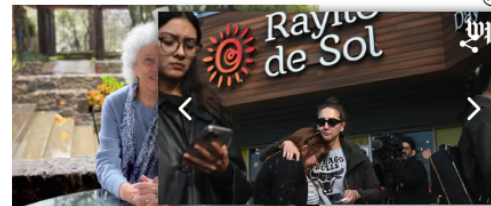
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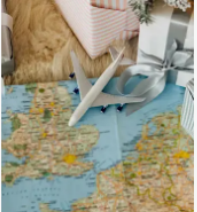
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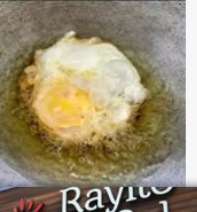
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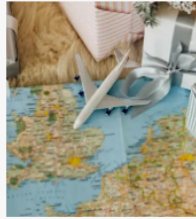
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