

Diplomacy and Justice: Exploring the US-China Counternarcotic Working Group

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate dynamics of the historic collaboration between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (PRC). United in the fight against the production and proliferation of fentanyl, the leading global superpowers have successfully created and engaged in the U.S-China Counternarcotics Working Group, with diplomatic relations serving as the foundation of progress. A focus on transparency, communication and collaboration imposed by the Biden administration has facilitated an unprecedented level of official cooperation. Nonetheless, Chinese participation is strongly contingent on its satisfaction with American relations, posing an intricate challenge for American policy makers and representatives. Though still in its early stages of development, the Counternarcotics Working Group will likely face one of its most challenging obstacles: the impending Trump presidency. The next four years have the potential to unravel the already established cooperation and inhibit its ability to produce results in the future.

Keywords: U.S-China Relations, Diplomacy, Narcotics, International Cooperation, Fentanyl

1. Introduction

A sense of *deja vu* overwhelms Americans as the opioid epidemic continues to grow and its effects become evident. The last two decades have seen an increase in the presence of lethal narcotics which pose grave health concerns for the American public. Fentanyl has become a prolific killer amounting to an unprecedented number of fatalities due to its lethality in small doses. By tracing the international narcotic supply chain, it is evident that the majority of fentanyl is produced outside the U.S., specifically China and Mexico. Though the majority of fentanyl produced as

a final product is fabricated in Mexican drug labs, the necessary precursor materials are manufactured in Chinese pharmaceutical companies.¹ Due to the sheer size of the Chinese pharmaceutical industry, and the lax regulations in place, fentanyl precursor materials have been steadily falling into the hands of international drug cartels. To address these issues at their root, the United States and China officially opened channels of cooperation and collaboration through the U.S-China Counternarcotics

¹ Martinez-Fernandez, Andres, and Andrew J. Harding. "Holding China and Mexico Accountable for America's Fentanyl Crisis." *The Heritage Foundation*. The Heritage Foundation, September 9, 2024. [Link](#).

Working Group. Due to the nature of the two participating members, the success of the initiative is vulnerable to the momentary nature of diplomatic relations. This paper will aim to explore the nuances of the fentanyl epidemic, China's role and responsibility and the necessities for successful cooperation.

II. An Opioid Strong Enough to Bring Down a Global Hegemon

Fentanyl is a synthetically produced receptor-stimulating opioid, first produced in 1960 by Dr. Paul Janssen in Beerse, Belgium.² Originally intended to be administered as an analgesic (implemented to relieve pain) and as an anaesthetic, it has quickly become one of the most lethal illicit drugs in American markets. The pharmaceutical unicorn is said to be over 10 times more potent than phenoperidine (an analgesic opioid), 50 times more potent than heroin and 100-200 times more potent than morphine.³ The production and regulation of pharmaceutical grade fentanyl in the United States quickly took hold throughout the latter part of the 20th century. Fentanyl excelled in its intended form of use, as a pain suppressant. Nonetheless, fentanyl carries highly addictive properties.

Towards the end of the century, and most notably in the 2000s-2010s, the market for illicit fentanyl grew exponentially. Illicit manufacturers of fentanyl expanded into an international drug ring. Clandestine production labs, primarily financed and managed by Mexican drug

cartels, began to sprout up dramatically increasing the tonnage of illegally produced fentanyl entering the U.S.. The black market for fentanyl has allowed for the mass production and trafficking of an extremely addictive and destructive narcotic which has had disastrous effects on the American people.

Fentanyl's addictiveness is derived from two main aspects: the almost instantaneous euphoric sensation users receive from consumption and its devastating symptoms of withdrawal. Addicts to the opioid often suffer symptoms of nausea, general pain, and an overall inability to feel happiness without being under the influence of the analgesic. It is this very aspect that has allowed fentanyl to take hold of the illicit drug market in the United States, essentially reviving Nancy Reagan's "War on Drugs". The opioid is often used to adulterate other illegal narcotics such as cocaine and heroin. This entails that users of other narcotics may unwillingly be exposed to the devastating effects of fentanyl. As drug cartels are not subject to quality controls and regulations when mixing narcotics, oftentimes the amount of fentanyl used to doctor drugs may be of a lethal dosage. Only 2 milligrams of fentanyl in its powder state is enough to prove lethal to the average person. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), fentanyl-related overdose fatalities in the United States have been steadily increasing since 2011. To give perspective, the amount of synthetic opioid (primarily fentanyl) related deaths in the United States in 2011 amounted to roughly 2,700. In 2021, fentanyl was responsible for over 70,000 deaths in the United States continuing to rise between 2022 and 2024, reaching a high

² Millar, Abi, and Abi Millar. "Fentanyl: Where Did It All Go Wrong?" *Pharmaceutical Technology*, February 27, 2018. [Link](#).

³ Drug Enforcement Agency. "Ficha Informativa Sobre Drogas." *Departamento de Justicia/Administración De Control De Drogas*. Drug Enforcement Agency, October 2022. [Link](#).

of 75,000 fentanyl-related fatalities in 2023, accounting for 70% of all drug-related deaths with a further 38,000 deaths caused by other synthetic opioids.⁴ From 2021 to 2023, more American lives were lost to fentanyl (approximately 222,000 deaths) compared to American lives lost in the First World War (1917-1919; 117,000 deaths).⁵ Every day, an average of two hundred Americans lose their lives to fentanyl.

Not only has the fentanyl market had an intensely detrimental effect on the livelihood of the American population, it has also exacerbated enormous pressures on the American health care system and economic institutions. According to the Joint Economic Committee (JEC) in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the dramatic increase in fentanyl usage was stimulated due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.⁶ Apart from the obvious effect on drug related fatalities, the uprise in fentanyl usage coupled with the pandemic has had important consequences for recovering drug users and their surrounding communities (family, friends, etc.). The pandemic saw a shift to remote health work, disrupting the treatment being received by recovering users, oftentimes performed in a face-to-face setting. The CDC states that the pandemic contributed to an increase in relapses, and subsequently an increase in fatalities. As the synthetic opioid situation has become increasingly relevant in American politics, both federal and state governments have

been forced to address the issue. In 2019, the federal government approved \$1.8 billion in grants to strengthen local governments abilities to combat the ever prominent opioid epidemic. The Biden administration enacted the American Rescue Plan (ARP) in 2021, dedicating \$5.5 billion to mental health and substance abuse prevention programs. Other government initiatives to tackle the opioid epidemic include the State Opioid Response grants in 2022, accruing \$1.5 billion, and CDC grants amounting to \$932 million awarded to all 50 states.⁷ The amount of people over the age of 12 who have been reported to suffer from opioid use disorder in 2020 reached a staggering 2.7 million (up from 1.9 million in 2019).⁸ As to the economic burden that the Opioid Crisis has had on the U.S., it is estimated that in 2020 alone, the cost of opioid use disorder and overdoses have amounted to a staggering \$1.47 trillion.⁹ It is evident that fentanyl has positioned itself as an extremely dangerous and harmful narcotic not only to the American people but to the health and federal institutions, which are indirectly affected. Having established the evidently detrimental effects the fentanyl trade is having on the United States, it is important to analyse how and where illicit fentanyl is being produced and how the US-China Counternarcotics Working Group is pivotal to addressing the epidemic.

⁴ Drug Enforcement Administration. "DEA: National Drug Threat Assessment 2024." *U.S Department of Justice*, May 2024. [Link](#).

⁵ Martinez-Fernandez, Andres, and Andrew J. Harding. "Holding China and Mexico Accountable for America's Fentanyl Crisis." *The Heritage Foundation*. The Heritage Foundation, September 9, 2024. [Link](#).

⁶ Beyer, Don. "The Economic Toll of the Opioid Crisis Reached Nearly \$1.5 Trillion in 2020." *Join Economic Committee Democrats*. Joint Economic Committee Democrats, 2020. [Link](#).

⁷ Beyer, Don. "The Economic Toll of the Opioid Crisis Reached Nearly \$1.5 Trillion in 2020." *Join Economic Committee Democrats*. Joint Economic Committee Democrats, 2020. [Link](#).

⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results From the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health." *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, 2020. [Link](#).

⁹ Beyer, Don. "The Economic Toll of the Opioid Crisis Reached Nearly \$1.5 Trillion in 2020." *Join Economic Committee Democrats*. Joint Economic Committee Democrats, 2020. [Link](#).

III. Chinese Responsibility in the Growing U.S. Fentanyl Crisis

It is difficult at first to see clearly how China plays a large enough role in the fentanyl trade for an international working group to be established between two direct global competitors. China has held the world's largest chemical industry since 2011 and has continuously expanded both domestic production and international exports. Moreover, China plays a pivotal role in the production of fentanyl and various precursor materials that eventually enter the American illicit drug market. China is home to an extensive list of manufacturing companies which produce fentanyl or fentanyl precursor chemicals (chemicals that can be used to produce fentanyl). The Chinese government has approved grants to 5 of the largest, domestic pharmaceutical companies including Yichang Humanwell Pharmaceutical, Jiangsu Nhwa Pharmaceutical, China National Pharmaceutical Industry Corporation, Changzhou Siyao Pharmacy, and Henan Lingrui Pharmaceutical.¹⁰ These pharmaceutical companies have been granted licences to legally produce fentanyl active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), transdermal patches and injections, strictly for medicinal purposes. It is important to note that none of these API manufacturers are permitted to sell their products directly to American markets, as they have not obtained Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. According to the Drug Administration Law of the People's Republic of China, these select pharmaceutical companies are solely permitted

to sell their products to three national wholesalers: Chongqing Pharmaceutical, Shanghai Pharmaceutical and Sinopharm.¹¹ These wholesalers are then tasked to supply the medical institutions in their designated areas. Despite the strict domestic regulations these Chinese pharmaceutical companies are subject to, it is the underregulated precursor producing chemical companies that are at the focal point of US foreign policy. According to Zongyuan Zoe Liu at the Council on Foreign Relations, there exist over 160,000 precursors-producing chemical companies in China, which are not held to the same level of regulation as the API manufacturers.¹² These chemical companies produce chemical intermediates which can be easily used to produce fentanyl. Chemicals produced in these companies are not regulated through the need for pharmaceutical production licences. A lack of regulation allows them to freely produce fentanyl precursor chemicals that are then trafficked to clandestine labs in Mexico via Chinese and Mexican cartel relations. The United States is of the understanding that China is the leading source of fentanyl related products which eventually are consumed by the American public. The identification of this understanding has led the United States to seek Chinese cooperation in disrupting the global fentanyl supply chain at its source.

¹⁰ Liu, Zongyuan Zoe. "Fentanyl Supply Chains in China: Chinese Fentanyl Makers and Domestic Circulation." *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 8, 2024. [Link](#).

¹¹ "Drug Administration Law of the People's Republic of China," n.d. [Link](#).

¹² Liu, Zongyuan Zoe. "Fentanyl Supply Chains in China: Chinese Fentanyl Makers and Domestic Circulation." *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 8, 2024. [Link](#).

IV. The U.S.-China Counternarcotics Working Group

The US-China Counternarcotics Working Group was officially inaugurated on the 30th of January, 2024.¹³ The working group establishes an unprecedented level of bilateral cooperation between the United States and China on the supply and distribution of fentanyl and its precursor chemicals. The initiative represents a monumental step forward in China-US relations spearheaded by their heads of state: President Joseph Biden (USA) and President Xi Jinping (China). The summit was directed by the Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jennifer Daskal, and several executive representatives of the US Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, Department of State, Department of the Treasury and the White House were present.¹⁴ The working group not only aims to address the supply of fentanyl, but to target all illicit precursor chemicals and equipment used in the manufacturing of related products. Beyond that, with the direction of the US Department of Justice, a heightened emphasis has been placed on addressing the illicit financing of the pertaining criminal organisations (a crackdown on money laundering). Lastly, the governments of both global powers have vowed to maintain clear and honest lines of communication and share information and intelligence to ensure cohesion and a successful implementation.

As the bilateral cooperation agreement is relatively young, noticeable effects on the fentanyl supply chain remain to be seen but great strides have been made in US-China cooperation. Even before the announcement of the formation of the counter narcotic working group, China began to demonstrate its willingness and belief in bilateral cooperation. In 2019 and 2020, the Chinese government began to crack down on websites selling fentanyl precursor chemicals to criminal organisations. China's National Narcotic Control Commission has enforced rigorous monitoring on the production and exportation of precursor chemicals and API manufacturers. Facilitated by the bilateral working group, China has expanded its list of monitored substances including 456 narcotic and psychotropic substances and 38 precursor chemicals.¹⁵ Not only has China shown determination to cooperate with the United States, but it has also begun to reestablish working connections with international fora, such as the United Nations, in the narcotic control sector. In addition, China has signed 50 intergovernmental cooperation agreements with more than 30 countries and international organisations.¹⁶

One of the most important aspects of the working group is an increased cooperation on Chinese money laundering methods. Crucial to the US Department of Justice is the exploration of the financial pillars of the responsible criminal organisations. China, which has historically been reluctant to cooperate with American

¹³ United States Department of State. "Launch of United States-People's Republic of China Counternarcotics Working Group - United States Department of State," February 1, 2024. [Link](#).

¹⁴ 贺霞婷. "Sino-US Counternarcotics Working Group Launched." World - Chinadaily.com.cn, n.d. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202401/31/WS65ba6ce7a3104efcbdae8fcc.html>.

¹⁵ "News: April 2022 – UNODC: Three Precursors of the Most Common Synthesis Routes Used in Illicit Fentanyl Manufacture Now Under International Control," n.d. [Link](#).

¹⁶ 马清. "Anti-narcotics Cooperation Receives Boost." Chinadaily.com.cn. [Link](#).

indictments, has agreed to maintain cooperation with the United States in anti-money laundering (AML). The presence of representatives of leading Chinese banks and financial institutions has proved pivotal to the disruption of the financial flows of international criminal organisations. Chinese money laundering operations have solidified their position as an integral part of the international fentanyl trade, notably through their *partnership* with renowned Mexican drug cartels.¹⁷ The use of national banks (unveiled by US indictments and investigations) and casinos has allowed Chinese money laundering organisations to effectively bypass AML regulations and transfer large amounts of money from country to country.

Increased Chinese cooperation is a major takeaway from the working group. Beijing has demonstrated its commitment to tackling counter narcotic operations and employing a more transparent approach to collaboration. There are several aspects that indicate China's inclination to continue cooperation both bilaterally with the United States and multilaterally with other countries and international organisations. China's increased responsiveness to American intelligence agencies and a consistent two-way flow of information has exemplified China's determination to continue cooperation. Furthermore, the Chinese government's increased monitoring and regulation of its colossal pharmaceutical and chemical industry coupled with an enhancement in bilateral security and law enforcement operations suggests

that China is aware of its culpability in the global fentanyl distribution network. Lastly, to increase regulation of the sale of precursor chemicals, China has contemplated the adoption of Know Your Customer (KYC)¹⁸ laws which will allow for efficient methods of tracking major buyers of intermediate chemical products. KYC laws require the selling party, in this case precursor chemical manufacturers, to request and archive several personal information of product purchasers.

V. Diplomacy as the Foundation of Cooperation

The history of bilateral cooperation between the United States and China on narcotic measures existed before the establishment of the counter narcotic working group, but due to diplomatic and strategic measures, cooperation severely deteriorated in 2020. There are several aspects which led China to disrupt cooperation, several of which are due to a poor direction in US foreign policy. Increased American military and navy presence in the South China Sea and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington. Chinese involvement early on in the Ukraine-Russia war received public condemnation from the Biden administration. China facilitated Russian evasion of western sanctions, expanding its oil and gas purchases since the start of the Russian war. The Biden administration further accused Beijing of providing Russia with enhanced military technology, including drones and fighter jets. It was the US Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan that culminated in the end of counternarcotics cooperation

¹⁷ "Federal Indictment Alleges Alliance Between Sinaloa Cartel and Money," June 18, 2024. [Link](#).

¹⁸ Bruhin, Natasha. "KYC in China – Identity Verification Requirements and Considerations." Trulioo, August 26, 2024. [Link](#).

between the two global superpowers. After a civil war in 1949, Taiwan and mainland China split but China maintains its claim over the island. Despite the US's long-standing "one-China policy", Speaker Pelosi's visit was viewed by Beijing as an act of sovereign recognition by the United States. The accumulation of these events led Beijing to dissolve cooperation almost entirely.¹⁹

The diplomatic relationship between the two countries is crucial to the potentially long term success of the working group. The United States and China should aim to maintain competitive interactions which respect the diplomatic policies of the other. Bilateral tensions and conflicts will only invite diminishing levels of cooperation. It is in the United States's interest to maintain relatively strong diplomatic relations with China to ensure the success of their pursuit against the fentanyl epidemic. As the Deputy Director of China National Narcotics Control Commission, Yu Haibin, stated: "The crisis in the U.S. is not manufactured by China; rather, its roots lie within the United States itself."²⁰ It is clear that China is not under the impression that they are strictly and solely responsible for the opioid epidemic in the United States.

VI. Obstacles to International Cooperation

The renewal of international cooperation between US and China, which facilitated the creation of the Counternarcotics Working Group, was catalysed by a

combination of tough US diplomacy and a Chinese initiative to mitigate reputational costs. As previously mentioned, Sino-American relations deteriorated noticeably in 2020, reprieving cooperation in counter-narcotic operations. In an attempt to foster cooperation, the United States lifted sanctions on the Institute of Forensic Science in China which had been previously isolated by the U.S Department of Commerce in 2020 for "engaging in activities contrary to the foreign policy interest of the United States" (human rights abuses). In 2023, the Biden administration enacted a series of foreign policies aimed at coercing China into reviving ties.²¹ In July of 2023, the United States enacted a global community to fight against the distribution and manufacture of a wide array of illicit drugs, including fentanyl. The Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats²² counted with the commitment of over 100 countries and international organisations, with the notable absence of the People's Republic of China. Beijing has long prided itself as having a strict and effective control on the production and distribution of narcotics under its jurisdiction, but its demonstrated absence raised international doubts on its commitment to the cause.

In September of 2023, President Biden signed off on the Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year

¹⁹ Associated Press. "Explainer: Why Pelosi Went to Taiwan, and Why China's Angry." *Voice of America*, August 3, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/explainer-why-pelosi-went-to-taiwan-and-why-china-s-angry-/6684414.html>.

²⁰ "China Cites U.S. Demand as a Top Concern Ahead of Talks on Fentanyl Smuggling." *Voice of America*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-china-fentanyl-talks-opioids-drugs-epidemic-precursor-rcna135399>.

²¹ Ching, Nike. "US Lifts Sanctions on Chinese Institute to Seek Fentanyl Cooperation." *Voice of America*, November 16, 2023. [Link](#).

²² House, White. "Memorandum on Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2024." The White House, September 15, 2023. [Link](#).

2024,²³ which identifies countries as major drug transit or illicit drug producing countries, as seen by the United States. In this edition of the memorandum, China was included. Biden's inclusion of China on what is known as the "Major List" severely harmed Beijing's reputation in regards to its counter-narcotic operations. But the measure which perhaps most notably pressured China into renewing cooperation came from the U.S Department of Justice and its powerful indictments of Chinese chemical companies in October of 2023. In cooperation with the DEA and the US Department of the Treasury, 28 Chinese companies and individuals were indicted on claims of involvement in the international proliferation of illicit drugs, primarily fentanyl. Companies such as Hebei Shenghao Import and Export Company, Lihe Pharmaceutical Technology Company, Henan Ruijiu Biotechnology Company, Xiamen Wonderful Biotechnology Company, and Hanhong Medicine Technology Company were charged with conspiring to traffic fentanyl and precursor chemicals along with involvement in international money laundering schemes.²⁴ The ground-breaking indictments were supplemented with multiple congressional hearings in which China's culpability in the US fentanyl epidemic was assessed. The United States reinforced these measures by denying visas to various Chinese executives and officials. These diplomatic pressures exerted on China by the United States began to

deteriorate China's global standing as an anti-narcotic regime. To secure geostrategic ambitions, China was 'coerced' into establishing cooperation with the United States and renewing its position as a strict regulator of narcotics trafficking.

VII. Analysis of the Counternarcotics Working Group

The increased cooperation between the United States and China on the production and distribution of fentanyl and its intermediate chemical products has, for now, proved to be a sane initiative. The operation has bolstered lines of communication between Beijing and Washington D.C., and has resulted in the implementation of stricter regulations on behalf of the Chinese government. An increase in common intelligence and information has allowed the United States to more accurately understand the function of Chinese money laundering organisations and enact powerful indictments to the responsible entities. Furthermore, the increased participation of China in international fora pertaining to the control of international narcotic distribution has bolstered the global initiative.

The success of the working group is directly contingent on the strength of diplomatic relations between both countries. As the United States and China continue their international rivalry for global influence and power, maintaining fruitful long-term relationships will be a delicate situation to be navigated by the US Department of State and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²³ House, White. "Memorandum on Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2024." The White House, September 15, 2023. [Link](#).

²⁴ "China-Based Chemical Manufacturing Companies and Employees Indicted," October 24, 2024. [Link](#).

VIII. What Another Trump Presidency Means for the Working Group

At the time of writing, Donald Trump has been re-elected to serve as the 47th President of the United States of America. He is set to take office on the 20th of January 2025. The change in presidency may have a meaningful impact on the future success of the cooperative initiative. As previously expressed, the working group was consolidated under the Biden administration, which despite maintaining certain competitive aspects with China, has progressively lowered tensions between the two superpowers which had emerged under Trump's first presidential term (2016-2020). To understand the potential attitudes expected of the US Department of State under a Trump administration, we can recall his previous attitudes during his term as the 45th President of the United States. Most notably, Donald Trump initiated a trade war with China, applying tariffs averaging to 18% on Chinese goods.²⁵ Not only did he implement these policies, but in aggressive rhetoric during his recent presidential campaign, he has floated the idea of tripling tariffs. Furthermore, Trump has claimed he will aim to reduce American dependence on Chinese products and services in all critical areas, as well as publicly rejecting all Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea. Lastly, in 2016, Donald Trump became the first U.S President since 1979²⁶ to maintain direct communication with his Taiwanese counterpart.

²⁵ Council on Foreign Relations. "Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Positions," n.d. [Link](#).

²⁶ Kubersky, Refael. "What Trump Has Promised to China in a Second Term." *FRONTLINE*, November 27, 2024. [Link](#).

As previously expressed, the success of the counter narcotic working group is highly dependent on the fluidity of American-Chinese diplomatic relations. Donald Trump has made clear his intentions at disrupting economic collaboration with China, an area of conflict which will most certainly spark tension between the two. Since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, Taiwan has always been a sensitive topic. The United States has pledged to stand by its "one China" policy, but Donald Trump has already demonstrated his willingness to defy such agreements. Trump's aggressive rhetoric clearly signals the potential for a future deterioration of relations between China and the United States, and such a situation would greatly incapacitate the working group's ability to continue providing results. Overall, the Trump presidency does not seem like a beneficial event for the future performance of the international initiative, but only time will tell.

VIV. Conclusion

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, global competition from the American perspective has greatly shifted towards China, the world's second largest economy and military power. Competition and tensions have been increasingly heightened in the last couple of decades through economic competitiveness and geopolitical strife. The quality of diplomatic relations between the two has fluctuated between fruitful periods of communication and periods of limited diplomatic interactions. Nonetheless, the rapid and rampant effects of fentanyl on the American population forced the Biden administration to seek resolve, looking at their main competitor for assistance. Through sound diplomacy and the restoration of strong diplomatic

ties, Beijing has recognised its responsibility in the American fentanyl epidemic and has sought to amend the situation through cooperation and collaboration. The US-China Counternarcotics Working Group was established to efficiently and effectively disrupt the flow of fentanyl in international supply chains, aiming to counteract the actions of international drug cartels. Since its inception, the initiative has proved successful through the implementation of pharmaceutical regulations on Chinese manufacturers. Now, the working group faces a new challenge in the form of the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump. A world leader notoriously aggressive and hostile towards China, Trump's vision of American foreign policy regarding the People's Republic will likely increase tensions and inhibit progressive diplomacy. Diplomatic relations are the key for the cohesion of the working group, and without them being productive, China is likely to end collaborative efforts, as it has done before. While competing with China, in order to keep combatting the fentanyl crisis, it is in the United States' best interest to facilitate a diplomatic atmosphere that still allows room for cooperation in mutually beneficial initiatives, such as the working group.

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