

Thomas G. Walsh
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USA, China and International Relations in the Post-Covid Era: Cold War or Rapprochement?

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UPF International, May 22—The sixth program of “Peace Talks,” entitled “USA, China and International Relations in the Post-Covid Era: Cold War or Rapprochement?” had more than 350 registered participants from 57 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh (*Chairman, Universal Peace Federation*) gave opening remarks and served as emcee. The coronavirus has created an enormous crisis, politically, economically, and socially. The crisis has also exacerbated existing tensions in the global order, particularly in the relations between China and the USA. Are we headed toward a new “cold war” era? Will the last century’s trend toward globalization and multilateralism be reversed, replaced by increased nationalism? Can the USA and China find a way forward that helps promote a global economic recovery? What steps should be taken?

Panelists:



Nancy Wei, Ph.D. (*Chair and Associate Professor, East Asian and Pacific Rim Studies, University of Bridgeport, USA*)

noted long-term structural problems exist between the United States and China. Disputes over Taiwan, Tibet, and trade have caused tension for decades. More recently, China's treatment of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, the status of Hong Kong and China's intentions towards the South China Sea have been sources of friction. China and the United States see one-another as strategic competitors. Prof. Wei sees both rapprochement and a "Cold War redux" as unlikely. The US and China are much more economically and culturally interconnected than the US and the USSR were during the Cold War. China does not have a network of satellite states like the USSR had. The US similarly does not have the wholehearted support of its allies that it had in the twentieth century. Prof. Wei concluded: the US and China are headed towards a "contentious coexistence," with globalization and multilateralism continuing into the foreseeable future.



Hon. Werner Fasslabend (*President, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, Austria*) said the COVID-19 crisis has affected the whole world, so there is no outside engine for pulling the global economy out of this situation. There is a need for a "new deal" to strengthen investments and consumer demand. Political priorities will reorient. The trade balance between China and the US will play a large role in the reorientation of their relations. Dr. Fasslabend foresees that

globalization will continue in spite of the crisis, which means there will be a continued need for cooperation among nations. What will be different is that countries will seek more strategic economic policy in order to ensure that key resources are available. The European Union sees its relationship with China as both a strategic partnership and an economic and political rivalry. Steady competition among global powers will continue, and the open question is which power will be "making the rules" for the second half of the twenty-first century. The answer to this question will be determined by who is most able to define common global interests.



Amb. Christopher Hill (*Chief Advisor to the Chancellor for Global Engagement, University of Denver; former head of U.S. delegation to the Six Party Talks*), in "What Does Washington Want From China? Pique Is Not a Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, May, 2020, calls for more constructive American policy towards China. American politicians criticize China every election cycle, but this cycle makes clear that the relationship between the US and China has deteriorated significantly. Unlike what existed regarding the USSR during the Cold War, there is no consensus in American politics about China. Job losses in the US manufacturing sector

have been primarily the result of automation, but, politically, a disproportionate amount of blame has been directed towards China. China has embarked on economic and strategic projects of expansion, which have created concerns over what exactly China's aspirations are. The US needs to be careful about rash movements towards "decoupling" with China. It is not in the US's interest to cut itself off from one of the great manufacturing centers of the world. The US's tendency in recent years to bilateralize its China relationship has weakened its diplomatic standing. The US needs to be more engaged in the world in order to have a more positive relationship with China.

Q&A: Dr. Fasslabend specifically called out China's rapid development of significant influence in almost every nation in Africa in the last few years. He reiterated that global interdependence calls for global cooperation. Prof. Wei called for politics to be left out of the COVID-19 response, making way for science; we should "fight the virus instead of fighting each other." Dr. Fasslabend called for dialogue between the US and China and North Korea in order to resolve the North Korea issue. In response to the notion that COVID-19 could be China's "Chernobyl moment," Amb. Hill was skeptical: China's response to the virus was poor, but its system is more complex and reactive than the USSR's. China has lost prestige, and will need to make changes to regain it. The panel ended on the note that while it is difficult for the US to work with China, it will be even more difficult to work against China.

- Report by Aidan Walsh, UPF International

Send comments to email: peacetalks@upf.org.

Watch for details for UPF's next webinar.

Upcoming Events

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JUN 1: [UN Global Day of Parents](#)

JUN 30: [UN International Day of Parliamentarism](#)

JUL 18: [Nelson Mandela International Day](#)

AUG 19: [UN International Day of Peace](#)

AUG 19: [UN World Humanitarian Day](#)



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