

## **Cooperative Competition Is Possible Between China and the U.S.     By Fu Ying, Nov. 24, 2020**

A former vice foreign minister of China proposes a way forward for the world's two leading powers.

BEIJING — The domestic politics of major countries are never kept within their borders — and the future policy orientation of the United States has become a hot topic for many people in China.

There is no denying the fact that China-U.S. relations have suffered serious damage over the past four years. Each country has expressed much complaint and concern about the other.

The United States believes that China craves world hegemony. China sees the United States as trying to block China's way forward and as hindering its people's pursuit of a better life.

It seems that both sides are convinced it is always the other party that is in the wrong; any initiative one of them undertakes is invariably seen by the other as an attempt to undermine it.

For example, China has proposed the Belt and Road Initiative as a global public good to promote more growth and greater connectivity, but America interprets the project as a strategy for geopolitical dominance.

As relations grew more tense in recent years, Washington started bullying Chinese high-tech companies and making things difficult for Chinese students. I have met many young Chinese entrepreneurs who studied in America and who today are puzzled to be treated like a security threat to the United States, after many years of a productive partnership between our two countries. The politicization of even people-to-people exchanges has left many wondering if what had long been mutually beneficial ties can be reinvigorated.

To refresh the relationship, each side must accurately assess the other's intentions. China does not want to replace U.S. dominance in the world. Nor does China need to worry about the United States changing China's system.

And it would be a tragedy of history if two countries of such power moved toward confrontation based on misperceptions. That would only work against their own fundamental interests, and many businesses and people would pay the price.

Both governments have heavy domestic agendas to attend to, and so even if competition between China and the United States is unavoidable, it needs to be managed well, cooperatively. It is possible for the two countries to develop a relationship of "cooperation" (cooperation + competition) by addressing each other's concerns.

In the fields of economics and technology, rules and laws must prevail. It is important that Beijing listen to and address the legitimate concerns of American companies in China, such as their calls for better intellectual property protection, cybersecurity and privacy. China is making strong efforts in all these areas by improving its laws and their enforcement. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress recently adopted amendments to China's copyright law, raising the cost of violations, among other things.

Washington, for its part, should ensure a level playing field for Chinese enterprises to operate in the United States. America's fear of Huawei's cutting-edge advantages should not be expressed through government bullying: This not only hurts the company, it also limits many people's access to technological progress. The U.S. government should instead be encouraging its companies to work and compete with Huawei.

Its attempt to block the popular social media platform TikTok on national security grounds also seems unfair since the United States has not publicly proved its allegations of security violations and the company has vowed to abide by all U.S. laws and regulations.

Washington's so-called national security argument against Chinese companies seems hypocritical to the Chinese, considering that China, over the course of four decades or more of reform and opening up, welcomed all kinds of Western technologies and American companies into China — all the while maintaining its own national security.

And yet if the two sides engage in equal and candid negotiations, they should be able to build a solid basis for long-term relations that are beneficial to both.

On the political front, it is high time that the United States drop its habit of interfering in other countries' internal affairs. One hopes that Washington will learn from its unsuccessful interventions the world over, for example in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. America's concerns that foreign forces might interfere with its presidential elections should serve as a good reminder of why other countries are so sensitive about U.S. intervention in their own domestic affairs.

China finds it offensive when the United States points a finger at the Chinese system or takes action against Beijing for its policies on domestic matters. But China also needs to be more proactive in providing the rest of the world firsthand information about what the country stands for and why it is doing what it is doing.

A calmer atmosphere can be cultivated when China and the United States respect each other and acknowledge that the other has a different political system that is working in its own way.

In the security field, both countries shoulder responsibilities for ensuring that the peace and tranquility that the Asia-Pacific region has enjoyed over the years continues to last. The United States should be respectful of China's sense of national unity and avoid challenging China on the issue of Taiwan or by meddling in the territorial disputes of the South China Sea.

Admittedly, China's growing navy has put some pressure on the United States in the western Pacific. The U.S. Navy, which has long claimed to be the dominant force in the region, finds the presence of a strong local military power today to be unsettling; its activities close to territories over which China claims sovereignty are met with growing objections from the Chinese military.

The United States' insensitivity toward China's concerns over Taiwan and territorial disputes in the South China Sea can only make Beijing suspect Washington's motivations: Does America want to help Taiwan go independent? Is it siding with the other claimants in the region in order to humiliate China as the imperialists did in the past?

To avoid any misunderstandings and unexpected conflicts, the two militaries should talk at the strategic level in order to build mechanisms to effectively manage potential crises and find other ways to coexist peacefully.

This is not impossible. In the late 1990s, China and the United States established a consultation regime about maritime security. Later, they set up both guidelines for handling unplanned encounters at sea and in the air and a hotline to defuse any possible crises. In recent years, they established formal mechanisms to notify each other of major military activities.

Now they need to have candid talks to better understand each other's intentions and cultivate trust.

Finally, a host of global issues call for close cooperation between China and the United States — the most urgent being the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Scientists from both countries have a solid track record of professional cooperation in responding to past health crises, and they should be encouraged to maximize again the potential for exchange and joint research. Both China and America are resourceful in vaccine development. If they cooperate to make vaccines more affordable and accessible, the whole world will benefit.

Climate change is another area that needs urgent attention. The world expects China and the United States to play a leading role, and the two countries have a lot to work on together. Other global topics — such as economic stability, digital security and artificial intelligence governance, to mention but a few — all cry out for united efforts as well.

To tackle these challenges, China and the United States should join hands and cooperate with all other concerned parties. Only then can multilateralism continue to bring hope for the betterment of humankind.