

BU Conference
21st Century Global Order
Preserve and Reform the International System

-I start from the premise that both the United States and China have much more to gain from the effective operation of an open, liberal international order than they do from any efforts to undo or break out of that system.

-As is on vivid display with COVID-19, future threats will not come from major power military conflagrations, but from non-state actors and natural and man-made disasters that will not respect sovereign borders and will not discriminate among victims, including governments.

-The key to co-existence of sovereign states is multilateralism and preservation and strengthening (or in some cases streamlining) of the international system and its institutions, especially rules, norms and standards.

-Some claim Coronavirus has weakened global support for international organizations and that rule of law is receding. But if we look at those that have, so far, handled this crisis most effectively, professional technocrats with authority and strong institutions and leadership have been key. The nature of a governing system may matter less than its capacity, solidarity and professionalism.

-But we currently face the situation where both the US and China appear poised to abandon or go around the architecture, conventions and constraints of the international system.

-No secret that Trump administration is a major accelerant of the weakening of the international system and an obstacle to fixing it. U.S. unipolarity is an anomaly and has been weighing on the system for some time: refusal to consider IFI quota reform, refusal to ratify UNCLOS, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, non-membership in some UN bodies, UN budget difficulties, etc. U.S. taxpayers have become increasingly reluctant to finance U.S. leadership of the international system.

-No secret that China is presenting a major challenge to the maintenance and health of the international system. While we should laud appropriate infrastructure development and development assistance efforts, China's Belt and Road Initiative is non-transparent, non-concessionary, and frankly undermines global development institutions in many cases. China complains about the U.S. opting out of multilateral agreements, but it, too, often opts out of inconvenient international obligations (intellectual property protections, WTO obligations, maritime boundary disputes, human rights obligations) or honors them in the breach.

-No secret that numerous international institutions face major challenges and are no longer fit for purpose, if they ever were. Problems with market capitalism, problems with global trade and finance, problems with creeping weaponization of interdependent markets. Other institutions, which produced the recent peace and comparative prosperity, are also ossified and

crumbling or non-existent: global technology standards and regulations, arms control regimes, non-proliferation regimes, export controls, economic sanctions, international migration agreements and many others. Not to mention many lasting points of tension and frozen conflicts around the globe that have seen little progress in recent decades.

-So, the urgent task: How to keep the US and China from breaking the international system, and how to sustain and improve it? We have to make it attractive for big powers, as well as smaller powers, and we must continue to contain the rivalry among major powers within this system. We also need to figure out how to pay for it fairly and sustainably.

-In an era of weak followership and reductionism, leaders will find it difficult to build consensus for changes. But if we do not make significant undertakings and compromises on a revised international system, we will likely be left with Ian Bremmer's G-Zero world. This will not be in the interests of either China or the West.

Nicolas Veron comments this morning: China not involved, and real problem for devising a new order w/China is they do not contribute. In absence of China's participation, narrative supplants what China is up to. Look at BRI: narrative in the U.S. is that this is a stealth military-strategic strategy for world domination. Why? Because China hasn't made clear what it is other than a very important political project.

Questions:

-How much does China value the current international system? What is it willing to do to maintain the system? What is China willing to forego to maintain the system? What would it like to change?

- Is the West willing to confer legitimacy on China's government to be a leader in the international system? What, beyond P5 membership and China's leadership in the UN, would it take for the West to do so, and what would China see as an acceptable indication that such conferral had taken place? What kind of leadership role is the West willing to give China?

- The absence of an authoritative and clear framing for relations between China and the West facilitates narrative takeover by narrow interest groups. A consensus strategic narrative that both sides understand and commit to is essential, and both sides will have to compromise their domestic political postures for the sake of maintaining the framing. What is a way of describing China and the West's interactions and relationship that maximizes the possibilities for mutually beneficial cooperation while reserving appropriately those areas of difference? What does China think are the requirements of a strategic partnership?

-Here it would be useful to revisit what happened in the wake of Robert Zoellick's proposal that the U.S. and China be "responsible stakeholders" in the international system (2005) and what happened in the wake of Xi Jinping's proposal to Obama in 2012 for a "new type of major power relations." Could China make a strategic decision to co-evolve with the West and help

the U.S. to overcome Thucydides and transition to a multipolar world order? (This was the essence of the Zoellick idea, although probably not elaborated or understood as such.) These two formulations are the closest to the notion that we should be striving for, so we should go back and examine why they failed. Kissinger proposed the notion of co-evolution, which is the one that I favor, since we individually and collectively have to adapt ourselves to the changing world and need to pool resources to collectively succeed. What would each side give up? What is the place of political system type in this co-evolution?

-What is the role of the P5 versus the G20 in discussions of reform of the international system? What would be the best format within which to discuss these issues? (A key question beyond the scope of today is what to do about Russia.)

-What are the priorities “needs” of China and the West that would satisfy each that they were able to take their appropriate place in the world and role in leading the international system and can these be reconciled?

Can't approach China positively – HR probs. China isn't going anywhere. Face reality. China always had HR problems – not a change. What has changed that somehow now we're talking about not being able to deal with China?

Very broad topics being tackled by this group, my main interest and expertise is in US-China relations, But

Crisis of authority in the world, and along lines Kevin mentioned, I fear that crisis response will only deepen the fissures, more bailouts for banks, young people who are alienated from government will become more so

Note the narrative obsession with whether or not command authoritarian systems are dealing better with this crisis. This seems to me to be beside the point.

Come back to Colin and Sergio points: China isn't going anywhere, US is averse to facing reality, looking to blame the other. Understand reluctance to embrace China's values, but these values haven't really changed and we've been dealing with China. So I think we have to ask ourselves what has changed? Yes, the Chinese regime is harsher, but that doesn't answer the questions.

I have recently been very attentive to the issue of narratives in international affairs, especially in US-China relations, and am very concerned that narratives are so divorced from reality and substance. It's a huge issue beyond our scope, but contributes to alienation from authorities.

Our main task for dialogue is to figure out whether China wants to be part of global system and how can West confer legitimacy on China to allow it to be part of that system.

One thing a group like this could do, in my view, is inject reality into the US discourse about how other countries view China's role in the world and their future interactions with China. US does not seem to realize that the US is isolated in its current relentlessly hostile approach. That's the kind of leadership we need to see from other players to avert the escalating security dilemma.

Jorge – Cold War coming. It will be worse.

Paul Martin – in globalization, we need one set of rules. How do we get there? Need G20
Main requirement was that every region be represented
2 priorities: pandemics and climate change
G20 health ministers April 20
Climate – if US and China don't take action, will be backlash in other countries
Saudis called a leaders meeting virtual next week, India pushed them
G7 US hosting a virtual meeting in June

Richard White – narratives very important in era of threat and scarcity, anti-globalizers

7 narrative plots, Richard ?

-extreme danger of blame game in corona virus – empower extremists, need narrative on results of cooperation

-strategic order, need rules in different orders, how does deepening US-China rivalry affect ability to set rules

-engage other states to criticize US-China narrative, push them to forge consensus on technical issues, State vs. market

-distinguish between orders, set common rules in some orders, diff norms in others

-what are common norms: peace, stability, prosperity

-develop more support beyond our group among elites that have influence and get some public statements.

Colin: repeated affirmation that narratives matter, Jorge really concerned about inevitability of bipolar era emerging and its consequences

Pulling letter together to get ideas out in public square