

Conference – 14th of April 2015

## CHINA-UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### « Geopolitical Condominium » or « Duel of the Century » in Eurasia ?

Summary

Anaïs Dufrasnes, Maxime Flahou

**On April 14**, the European Institute for International Relations (IERI) organized the seventh Conference of this academic year. The title of this session was “**CHINA - UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**”, the topic revolving around China and the United States relations and the question of a geopolitical condominium in Eurasia.

Bruno Boissière, Director at Centre International de Formation Européenne (CIFE), chairman for the first time at IERI, left the floor to **Professor Irnerio Seminatore, President of the European Institute for International Relations** for its introduction on the subject. To him, China has become an emerging power that deploys a real diplomacy in Eurasia. Before dealing with the ambivalence of US-China relations, at times partners, at times rivals and ending its introduction on the possible geopolitical condominium in Asia, Professor Seminatore approached the question of China foreign policy's development through the years.

After thanking Mr Seminatore for inviting him to this conference, His Excellency the Ambassador Qu Xing began his speech, divided into six observations, that we have the honor to present you as follow.

*« My first observation concerns the importance and sensitiveness of China-US relations. China-US relations are the most important and sensitive bilateral relationship for China. As China and US are the top two largest economies in the world, US being the largest developed country and China being the largest developing country, China-US relations are of vital importance not only to China, but also to the Asia-Pacific region and the world as a whole. Should China-US relations fail to function well, it will be next to impossible for major countries in the world to build constructive relations or secure peace, stability and development in the region. And China will find it difficult to realize the “Chinese Dream” and “two centenary goals” for its modernization.*

*Meanwhile, China-US relationship is also the most sensitive one, due to the big differences the two countries have in social system, ideology and values. China does not believe that the political system US recommended to China will bring China stability and prosperity, while US believes that China's way of governance is not consistent with universal criteria of democracy. Some people in China worry about US intention to contain China in order to eliminate competitor. Some people in the US fear that China might exclude US from Asia-Pacific in order to seek hegemony in East Asia. There is a deficit of trust between the two. And this deficit of trust, intertwined with territorial and maritime disputes in the Asia-Pacific region, may get involved one day China and US into a conflict.*

*The second point I would like to analyse is how China-US relationship became complex. China and US used to be allies in WWII, and their relations were not expected to become so complex as today. Both China and US were confronted with Japanese aggression during the Second World War. The two countries joined their efforts with the world's anti-fascist forces, to defeat Japanese militarism. The US offered great help to China at a critical moment, which the Chinese people will always keep in mind. When the Second World War came to an end, the Chinese people held good feelings towards the US.*

*After the Second World War, however, although the US diplomats in China sent to Washington many reports about KMT party's corruption and doomed destiny, and made suggestion that the US government should adopt a pragmatic attitude towards the political force led by Mao Zedong, so as to save room for future China-US relations, the Truman administration, in the context of Cold War and based on a totally wrong*

*assessment of situation in China, still attempted to help KMT to eliminate CPC in the battle fields. To the disappointment of the US government, KMT was so corrupted as to beyond remedy, the US intervention not only failed to change the result of China's Civil War, but cost it the good opinion of Chinese people.*

*In the 60-odd years since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China-US relations experienced three phases. The first phase (1950-1970) marked hostility in China-US relations. The two countries fought each other in Korean War and Vietnam War. The second phase (1971 to 1991) began with Kissinger's visit to China and ended with collapse of Soviet Union. When China and US both faced strategic threat from former Soviet Union, their relations began to improve. The two countries provided each other strategic support and both gained benefit from their cooperation. China's external environment was improved, which is conducive to China's reform and opening up policy. The US ended the Vietnam War and defeated Soviet Union in the Cold War. We are now living in the third phase of China US relations, that is, the post-Cold War era. In this period, China-US relations are featured by a complex mix of cooperation and competition. This is because when the threat from Soviet Union disappears, some people in the US see China no longer as a partner, but as a potential rival. For that reason, despite China's many positive efforts, bilateral relations are still in want of real mutual trust.*

*The third point I would like to discuss is about the major problem between China and US. The fundamental problem with China-US relations is that the US suspects that China intends to seek hegemony in East Asia and challenge its dominant position in the world.*

*The US maintains its global dominance by keeping balance of power in every region in the world, and will not allow a single power in any region to grow strong enough to pose challenge to the US. Prior to the Second World War, Japan seized Chinese island of Taiwan and the entire Korean peninsula, and attempted to create an extensive empire that included Taiwan, Korea, and North-East China. For that purpose, Japan even launched the Pearl Harbor attack to keep the US at bay. Should Japan succeed in building the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", the US will disappear from East Asia. That is why the US would not let Japan to dominate the Asia-Pacific, and why the US helped China to resist Japanese aggression.*

*It was for the same reason that the US supported China against Soviet Union's threat in the 1970s. The fast expanding Soviet Union became a growing threat to the US, so the latter needed a stronger China to balance Soviet Union in Eurasia.*

*If we follow this logic, we will see that after the Second World War, Japan is no longer a threat to the US, nor is Russia after the collapse of Soviet Union. While China, with its high-speeding growing economic and military strength, seems to be posing challenge to balance of power in Asia. So, rather than Japan or Russia, it is now China's turn to be "balanced". That is where the US strategy of "back to Asia" or "pivot to Asia", or "rebalance in Asia-Pacific" comes from. Whatever name it is called, it presumes that China breaks the balance of power in Asia-Pacific which needs to be rebalanced.*

*The fourth point I would like to share is that China has neither intention nor capability to challenge the US, let alone to replace US as world's dominant power.*

*The international order today is the result of the world's anti-fascist war. China and US, as victory countries, are both beneficiaries of the post war order. One received high-speed growth, the other became the only super power in the world. Therefore, although today's international order is not perfect, China shares the common interests with the US in maintaining the order rather than overthrowing it.*

*Hegemony is never part of Chinese culture. The Chinese culture is a defensive one that believes in peace. China invented gunpowder, but instead of making guns or cannons out of it, the Chinese people made fireworks and crackers for festival celebration. China invented the compass, but instead of making military vessels to conquer the world, Chinese people made cargo ships for foreign trade. Chinese navigator Zheng He from Ming Dynasty made foreign voyages before Christopher Columbus discovered America. And unlike the latter, Zhenghe's voyages brought to other countries commodity and friendship, other than war and bloodshed. The Chinese culture believes in benevolent and opposes hegemony. The difference between the*

*two is that the former wins people's support by virtue, while the latter forces people to submit.*

*China has made it clear in its national policy and constitutions that it opposes hegemony. Mao Zedong once said, we will dig deep the tunnels, keep vast the stores of grain, and never seek hegemony. China opposes other countries to seek hegemony, and will not seek hegemony itself. Deng Xiaoping once made an announcement at the United Nations that, "China is not a superpower which subjects other countries to its aggression, interference, control, subversion or plunder and strives for world hegemony. If one day China should turn into a superpower which should play the tyrant in the world, and subject others to her bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it.... I have never known leaders from any other country who are so straight-forward about possible hegemony in their own countries.*

*We understand that US's position in the world today does not come from nowhere. It is well earned through the country's huge sacrifices in the First and Second World Wars. I have visited a lot of American cemeteries in Europe. Below the white marble crosses all over the hills and fields, lie the bodies of hundreds of thousands of young American soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the two world wars. It is because of these sacrifices that the US gains its position in the world. We are perfectly aware of that.*

*Although China's national strength has been largely improved over the past 30 years, and although China has become the second largest economy in the world, China's population is four times as large as that of the US, and China's per capita GDP and per capita share of resources lags far behind the US. China faces enormous challenges of population, environment, resources, ethnic separatism and other domestic problems. Even in a peaceful environment, the Chinese government will have to work at full stretch to address these issues. China's military strength is far behind that of the US, and China's annual military input is only about a quarter that of the US. For the reasons above, China has neither the motivation nor the ability to challenge the US.*

*The fifth point I would like to emphasize is that China and US can establish a new type of major country relations. It is not surprising that some people have concerns about the prospects for China-US relations. Because the history of international relations has so far confirmed the well-known "Thucydides trap" where a rising power causes fear in an established power which escalates toward war. In the 20th century, the rise of Germany and Japan led to world war. Traditional theory on international relations believes that when a weak country becomes strong, it will not be happy with its given international status, and will seek to change the existing order of international relations, thus posing threat to the interests of established powers. Therefore, the relationship between rising powers and established ones is a "zero-sum game". In a nutshell, the theory claims that a rising power will challenge the existing order which will lead to war, and therefore is dangerous. So will China be an exception?*

*To avoid the "Thucydides trap", President Xi Jinping put forward the initiative of a new type of major country relations between China and US, which received positive response from President Obama. The new type of major country relations believes that emerging powers and established powers can make the pie bigger through cooperation and achieve win-win situation. Science and technology in today's world has developed to such a high level that the rise of emerging powers will not necessarily cause shortage of resources. And due to the development of military technology and weapons, there will be no winner in the war between major countries. People have realized that war is no longer a good idea to gain resources or market. So, as a result of technological development, emerging powers and established powers are perfectly capable of achieving a win-win scenario. After all, today's world featured by globalization, high technology and interdependence between different countries is totally different from that of the colonial era one hundred years ago.*

*Last but not least, the sixth point I would like to share is that to build this new type of major country relations, China and US should intensify cooperation and manage differences. China and the US have carried out fruitful cooperation in many areas, such as counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, anti-piracy, international waterway security, combat against transnational crimes and transnational epidemics, environmental protection and climate change. Positive results of China US cooperation have also been*

*achieved on issues relating to Afghanistan, the Aden Gulf, the Iranian nuclear issue, the DERA nuclear issue, Ebola in Africa, etc..*

*Of course, we also have differences on several international issues, including issues relating to Iraq, Libya and Syria. The US believes that democracy can be introduced into countries by using military force. We Chinese believe that no one knows better a country than the people of the country concerned, and that a reckless use of force against other countries will create more problems than solutions.*

*China-US relations can become vulnerable or shaky if US fails to properly handle the issues related to China's internal affairs such as Taiwan and Tibet, or historical issues between China and neighbouring countries, such as the Diaoyu Islands issue between China and Japan, and Nansha Islands issue between China and some Southeast Asian countries.*

*On the Taiwan question, China and US have differences, but have managed to keep it under control. Three communiqués have been signed on the issue. The "Shanghai Communiqué" of 1972 recognizes that there is but one China and that Taiwan is part of China. The "Joint Communiqué" of 1978 acknowledges PRC government as the sole and legitimate government of China. The "August 17 communiqué" of 1982 requests the US side to gradually decrease, and finally stop its sale of arms to Taiwan. The US does not support China to resolve the Taiwan issue by non-peaceful means, nor does it support Taiwanese authorities to undermine cross-strait relations by seeking independence. In fact, when Chen Shui-bian authorities of Taiwan attempted to seek "Taiwan independence" in 2007, the US issued a rare rebuke of Chen's actions.*

*On the Diaoyu Islands issue, the US is not beyond reproach for causing the problem. When Japan surrendered in 1945, the US failed to urge Japan to return to China the Diaoyu Islands along with Taiwan as agreed. Instead, in 1972, the US handed the Diaoyu Islands over to Japan together with Okinawa. The US said it held "no position" over the sovereignty issue of Diaoyu Islands, and "does not take side", and "hope to see settlement through negotiations". But in reality, the US declared that US-Japan security treaty applies to the Diaoyu Islands, which encouraged Japan's refusal to negotiate. China's position is to resolve the issue through negotiations. If the conditions are not mature, then the issue can be laid aside so as not to affect the overall situation of bilateral relations. The Diaoyu Islands issue to China-Japan relations is like an intoxicated branch to a big tree. We should freeze the branch so that the toxins will not spread to the entire tree. But some Japanese right-wingers, such as former Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, deliberately stirred up trouble, and forced the Chinese government to make response. If the US does not wish to be involved in bigger problem between China and Japan, it only needs to urge Japan to negotiate, or at least to lay aside the dispute instead of making provocation.*

*On the issue of South China Sea, China stands for peaceful settlement through negotiation between the countries directly concerned. Since 1949, China has already solved 90% of land disputes with 12 neighbouring countries through peaceful negotiations. In 2000, China settled the Beibu (Tonkin) Gulf demarcation issue with Vietnam through negotiations. China believes that as long as we sit down and talk, we can always find a mutually acceptable solution. But some claimants are not interested in negotiations. Instead, they take unilateral actions which further complicate the situation. I am referring to oil exploration in the South China Sea. So far, all the other claimant states are drilling oil in the disputed area of the South China Sea, except China. China values freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. If the US does not wish to see big problem with the South China Sea issue, it should urge the parties involved to sit down and negotiate to resolve the issue of overlapping exclusive economic zones.*

*Of course, it always takes two to tangle. Therefore China's effort alone will not be enough to ensure a good China-US relationship. Constructivism in international relations has a theory that if one presumes the other country as a friend, the latter will feel the good will, and respond as a friend, thus forming positive interaction. In the opposite case, if one presumes the other as a foe, and takes hostile approach, then the latter will feel the hostility and take corresponding countermeasures, creating a vicious circle. Therefore, you can choose to create a friend or a foe.*

*China regards the US as a partner and friend, that is why China proposes a new type of major country*

*relations. We hope the US will also see China as a friend. Constructivism is a dialectical method in international relations. I believe in dialectics. I do not believe there will be any “duel of the century in Eurasia” between the US and China. I am very much encouraged by the positive interactions between President Obama and President Xi Jinping. I am optimistic about the future of China-US relations. »*

Afterwards, the Deputy chief of Mission, Mr Mark Storella, took the floor and began by mentioning that his goal is not to start a debate but to point out a few general views on: (1) how the United States sees Asia and the Pacific, which is very different from the European perspective; (2) the rise of China; and (3) the nature of the American-Chinese relations and the place of the European Union in this equation.

Since President Obama's election in 2009, much attention has been paid to his policy of “re-balancing towards Asia”. Some ask if it meant moving away from Europe and/or containing China.

To understand this policy, it is important to recognize that the U.S. is both an Atlantic and Pacific nation. The U.S. has long had important historical, strategic, and economic ties to the entire Pacific region.

He pointed out that the U.S. made its debut on the international stage with the opening of Japan in 1853. He then cited other important events: the 1899/1900 open door policy when the United States urged all to respect China's territorial integrity; U.S. involvement in the Pacific in WWII; the Korean War; the Vietnam War; and Nixon's opening to China. Strategically, the United States has security commitments to many Pacific countries including Japan, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia. Economically, U.S. trade with Asia has nearly doubled in the last ten years and now stands at over \$1.4 trillion.

Mr. Storella explained that “re-balancing” therefore really represents continuity of American historical, strategic and economic interests in the Pacific, even though the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq drew American focus toward the Middle East.

Mr. Storella said that the Chinese economy, with international assistance, including from the United States, has seen unprecedented growth that has been ten times faster and ten times bigger than the growth of the United Kingdom's economy during the Industrial Revolution. However, if we look at China's relative proportion of the world's total GDP going back 2000 years, China has generally constituted about 30% of global economic output. For about 150 years, China's economy was relatively small, due to internal chaos and rebellions. But, in the past 20 years, China has returned to a more normal proportion of the world's GDP, around 20%. China often considers itself a developing country, but already over one-quarter of China's population – about 350 million people – have been lifted out of poverty. The question is: will China continue to grow?

As Mr. Storella mentioned, China is using its wealth mostly to improve the living standards of its people, a historically important achievement. It is also increasing military expenditures dramatically, contrary to spending trends in the United States and Europe. China is creating a blue-water navy, something China has never had, and is building islands in the South China Sea in territories disputed by most of the neighbours in the region. Regarding the Senkaku Islands, the United States does not take a position on competing claims, but President Obama made clear that our bilateral security agreement covers the Senkakus because the islands are now under Japanese administration.

Mr. Storella asked then, how China will organize itself politically as it evolves? Communist ideology is all but gone and legitimacy is based largely on the government's ability to deliver improving standards of living. How will that change? Mark Storella suggested, “we do not need revolution but evolution in China.”

Mr. Storella expressed support for the idea of democracy based on the principles human dignity and human rights, as recognized by all, including China, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Given these many developments, some ask if the United States and China are competitors or adversaries. Mr. Storella pointed out that the United States has been a great friend to China – supporting Chinese territorial integrity in the Open Door Notes, investing in the education system of China after the 10/10/11

revolution, defeating Japan in World War II, siding with China when it faced Soviet hegemony, and maintaining an open trading system that has enabled China to prosper. The economies of the United States and China are now interdependent. Both countries have an interest in the other's success. Therefore, we are partners.

Mr. Storella cited the words of former World Bank President Robert Zoellick who called for China to be a "responsible stakeholder" in world affairs. Prospects for cooperation between the United States and China will depend on the two countries developing a common view of what "responsible stakeholder" means.

Mr. Storella noted that some have spoken of a U.S.-China condominium or a G-2. The United States does not see the world that way. In a globalized world, there are many relevant actors. The G-20 is a much more relevant forum. He also urged that Europe take a greater interest in Asia and the Pacific, beyond its burgeoning trade. Mr. Storella concluded that, the United States wants a strong Europe and a strong China because it is in America's interest to have strong partners.

In the public today, we had also His Excellency Mister ISHII. After a brief historic introduction on China-Japan and US-Japan relations, he remarked that Japan does not perceive a strong China as problematic. Good relations between China and the United States of America is even essential to Japan interests. The question that he raised to our attention was the following : Do China and the United States support the assumption that today we do not want to change a status quo by force ? Mister the Ambassador Qu Xing answered by mentioning the principle by which China lives, "peaceful coexistence". China try to maintain the status quo, and support the cohesive notion of behavior.

In response to the question raised by the Japanese Ambassador, Mr. Storella said that we should all agree that no one should use force to assert territorial claims in the South China and East China seas. He also said that the use of force can be seen as a continuum, and provocative actions with navy ships, airplanes and even fishing vessels could lead to unintended consequences. When we think of what the term "responsible stakeholder" means, it should mean avoiding such provocative actions.

The theme of the next conference organized by the European Institute for International Relations will be on cyber-war and will take place on **April 28**, with the participation of Olivier Kempf, Associate Research Fellow at IRIS and Director of La Vigie , and Mr Gertjan Boulet, Researcher at the Department of Law, Science, Technology & Society .