After the Post-Cold War Era: Geostrategic Dynamics of the Interregnum & A Vision for Eurasian Common Security Diplomacy

Eurasia Common Security Workshop

Berlin, September 23, 2019

I want to thank Cora Fabros, Reiner Braun and other Workshop organizers, for the opportunity to be joining this gathering. As challenging as these times are, I trust that what I learn from you will prove helpful as with partners in Europe, the U.S., Russia and Asia we develop a 21st century call and network to advance common security.

**The Uncertain and Dangerous Interregnum**

It has become increasingly clear that the post-Cold War era is over. We are living in the interregnum between disorders, marked by uncertainties and dangers, as well as opportunities. Some see the confrontations of the moment as a new Cold War. Michael Klare has written that the U.S. and China are engaged in war by another name[[1]](#endnote-1), while the U.S. government uses the term “strategic competition.” Richard Hass, the former head of Policy Planning at the State Department, and others see analogies to the period leading to World War I: tensions between rising and declining powers, complex alliance structures, intense nationalism, territorial disputes, arms races with new technologies, economic integration and competition, autocracies and wild card actors.

The relative decline of U.S. imperial power and the emergence of a multi-polar disorder were evident during the Obama years, but they have been accelerated by Trump’s ignorance, authoritarianism, incompetence, arrogance, racism, dishonesty, trade wars, disregard and abrogation of treaties, and his humiliation of U.S. allies. Thinking of Mussolini and banana republics, I am continually amazed, and not a little frightened, by the power this pathetic tyrant wields over the U.S., the world, and our collective futures.

The novelist William Faulkner wrote that “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.” Trump, unfortunately, is an expression of the long U.S. history of racist know nothing political movements and the deluded American exceptionalist ideology.

Unlike Trump, and thinking geostrategically, we do well to recall that the Cold war was multi-dimensional. The U.S. – Soviet competition for world dominance overlaid a world still largely defined by the legacies of 18th and 19th century imperialism, Russian as well as American and European. Now, struggle for dominance has become still more complicated with China’s rise, relative U.S. and more serious Russian decline, the emergence of multi-polarity, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons and asymmetric technologies.

The Middle Kingdom’s spectacular rise has been disorienting in much of the West and in Japan: six hundred million people lifted from poverty, advanced industrial and technological expertise, a hybrid form of state capitalism, new means of near-totalitarian social control, and an updated version of tributary empire that is extending its influence across Eurasia and the South China Sea. With the Belt and Road Initiative comes the potential of the deepening integration of Eurasian economies, cultures and political influence from Seoul to Sweden, with the U.S. on the geostrategic margins.

Recall Mackinder and Brzezinski. They argued that whoever controls Eurasia is the world’s dominant power. This helps to explain U.S. island power policies: efforts to contain China with its near-encirclement of the Middle Kingdom with alliances and military bases, the so-called “Freedom of Navigation” military exercises, the embrace of Modi’s Hindu authoritarianism, massive U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, Trump’s disastrous trade war with China, and the recent joint military exercises with ASEAN nations.

The Administration’s National Security Statement calls for “strategic competition” and preparations for a three-front “Long War” against China and Russia.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Not unrelated is Russia’s reassertion of its great, if economically weak, power capacities which are tacitly allied with China’s. Responding to NATO’s reckless expansion to its borders, Moscow is increasing its export of advanced weaponry, fossil fuels and other natural resources to China, while deepening its military collaborations and joint “exercises” with the PLA,

Elsewhere, Russia is renewing its influence in Europe and the Middle East, even checking the U.S. in Venezuela. Although it has reduced its military budget, it is compensating with asymmetric technological capabilities and by its efforts to upgrade its nuclear weapons and delivery systems. As we saw in August’s Archangel nuclear missile accident, we don’t have to wait for a war to be victimized by the new arms races.

Across Asia, the United States’ junior partner, Japan, is hedging its bets. It is collaborating with the U.S. in deepening a regional alliance structure including Taiwan, the Philippines (despite Duterte[[3]](#endnote-3),) Australia and India. Tokyo’s bet is that this alliance system might survive and serve Japan should the U.S. pull back from the region under regional or domestic political pressures. Reinforcing this dynamic, Prime Minister Abe remains steadfast in his efforts to trash Article 9, the foundation of Japan’s peace constitution. Further afield, intensifying Indian-Pakistani tensions and their nuclear arms race threaten both South Asian genocide and the survival of people across the northern hemisphere.

Add to this stew, the reality that nuclear weapons technologies are now nearly eighty years old, increasing the dangers of proliferation. North Korea’s nuclear arsenal fuels right-wing nuclear ambitions in Japan and South Korea. Trump’s violation of the Iran nuclear deal may rekindle Teheran’s nuclear program. Saudi Arabia apparently has ambitions to join Israel as the second nuclear weapons state in Southwest Asia. And Bolsonaro in Brazil has his own nuclear ambitions

The nuclear danger didn’t end with the Nagasaki A-bombing. As Dan Ellsberg has long taught, during wars and international crises, every U.S. president has used nuclear weapons in the same way that an armed robber points his gun at his quarry’s head. Whether or not the trigger is pulled, the gun has been used. On more than 30 occasions the U.S. has practiced this nuclear terrorism. With the history of U.S. first-strike nuclear threats against North Korea, it’s not hard to understand what has driven the DPRK’s nuclear program. Unfortunately, the U.S. is not alone in practicing nuclear brinksmanship and extortion. Every nuclear weapons state has threatened or prepared to initiate nuclear war on at least one occasion.

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* tells us that the time is two minutes to midnight. They cite the lack of coherent U.S. foreign and military policies, the U.S. first-strike doctrine, the nuclear powers increased reliance on their nuclear arsenals, which are being upgraded across the world. They also cited the return to Cold War rhetoric and the absence of arms control negotiations, which has since resulted in the collapse of the world’s arms control architecture.

**Common Security**

While China has reiterated its “no first use” doctrine, it is on track to “surpass France as the world’s third-largest nuclear armed state” and is reinforcing its second-strike arsenal in the face of the rising U.S. challenge.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Which brings me to the imperative of developing a vision and advocacy for common security diplomacy that can see us through this increasingly dangerous and uncertain time.

My understanding of Common Security is rooted in Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme’s Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security. At the height of the Cold War in 1981 & 82, Palme brought together heads of state, foreign ministers and political leaders from Europe, the Soviet Union, North America, Japan and the Global South to explore how to reverse the spiraling arms race that threatened human survival.

The commission’s conclusion was that “it is important to replace the doctrine of mutual deterrence,” and that the two great powers “must achieve security not against the adversary but together with him. International security” it warned “must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on a threat of mutual destruction.” Its Common Security paradigm grew from the truism that neither individuals nor nations can be secure unless their rivals simultaneously enjoy security.

The Commission recognized that when nations develop and deploy new weapons and military doctrines to counter perceived threats, their actions are seen as escalating threats. That, in turn, leads the newly threatened rival to respond in kind, resulting in a spiraling arms race and to increased dangers of deadly miscalculations. This is today’s reality.

The Palme commission, spurred and reinforced by massive social movements and protests, identified six principles that contributed to the negotiation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, functionally ending the Cold War:

* All nations have a legitimate right to security
* Military force is not a legitimate instrument for resolving disputes between nations
* Restraint is necessary in expressions of national policy
* Security cannot be attained through military superiority
* Reductions and qualitative limitations of armaments are necessary for common security
* “Linkages” between arms negotiations and political events should be avoided.

**Foundations for 21st Century Common Security**

How might these principles apply to rising U.S.-Chinese military, economic and political tensions and to others in the Asia-Pacific region?

In the U.S., China is widely seen as a revisionist power, a “peer competitor” challenging U.S. global hegemony and the U.S. imposed liberal international economic order. Indeed, the rules of the post-World War II disorder were designed to benefit Western elites, not the Chinese elite or the Chinese people. To overcome these inhibiting imbalances, we now have the AIIB competing with the IMF and the World Bank. We have the Belt and Road initiative, and we have China’s claims and neo-imperialist actions in the South China Sea.

Yet, in many ways, China’s rise mimics that of the U.S and other Western countries: exploitation of workers, protectionist tariff walls, industrial espionage and intellectual property theft, and the Marshall Plan and so-called foreign aid. China’s claims and bases in the South China Sea echo the Monroe Doctrine, the rationale for U.S. conquests and neo-colonialism across the Caribbean, Central and South America.

Michel Klare argues that technologically, economically, diplomatically and via the military buildups and provocative military “exercises”, the U.S. and China are already at war Elsewhere, Graham Allison has won acolytes for his contention that we face a classic Thucydides Trap, the inevitable tensions between rising and declining powers that often lead to disastrous wars.[[5]](#endnote-5)

But even Allison concedes that a great power war is not inevitable, and Ho-fung Hung of John Hopkins University makes a powerful case that the China Boom is not “a subversive power within the U.S.-centered global neoliberal order.” China’s rise, he argues, has been dependent on the post-war order, that the U.S. and Chinese economies remain mutually dependent, and that China seeks to revise the balance of power within the neoliberal system, not to overthrow it.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Contrary to Trump, sectors of the U.S. elite are urging coexistence, as well as competition, with China.[[7]](#endnote-7) Recall too that popular movements and diplomatic initiatives brought us U.S.-Soviet détente and an end to the Cold War despite deeper ideological differences, distrust, and vested – if different - interests, and existential threats.

If Trump is defeated in 2020 there may be a constituency for the pursuit of Common Security diplomacy with Beijing. We thus need to prepare for the medium and longer terms, clarifying our vision and policy recommendations, and putting our advocacy networks in place.

Negotiations need to seek and identify shared interests despite differences, addressing the legitimate national interests of the engaged states and their peoples. At its core, such diplomacy needs to address the distrust and increasingly dangerous military and economic competition between the U.S. and China, as well as the tangle of six-party tensions across Northeast Asia. It must not simply seek a U.S.-Chinese grand bargain. Because means determine ends, the process must include inputs from the region’s nations and civil society. If it can be commenced, common security diplomacy will require political will, popular support, patience, and compromise, pursued via complementary bi-polar and multi-polar negotiations.

A decade ago, I asked Professor Shinhide Mushakoji, one of Japan’s most respected scholars, how war between the U.S. and China could be avoided. His answer: “Build the web of relations that make war unthinkable.” This, I think, is the most important and challenging common security task before us, and it applies to U.S./NATO tensions with Russia. Even in the face of Trump’s trade war, growing political repression in China, and mutual U.S.-Russian suspicions, some of this web is already in place and can be preserved and built upon.

Our most important resources lie in U.S.-Chinese economic interdependence and the number of U.S. and Chinese scholars, students and business people who interact daily. The outrage voiced by U.S. farmers, financiers and industrialists in response to President Trump’s ill-conceived order to stop doing business with China was so immediate and so powerful that it forced Trump to reverse course – at least rhetorically.[[8]](#endnote-8)

We also have the precedent of the semi-annual U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogues that, if revitalized, could serve as a forum in which to negotiate alternatives to Trump’s Trade War and dangerous U.S. and Chinese military confrontations. Creating systems for crisis management could later serve as a foundation for disarmament negotiations. Addressing the continuing nuclear tensions on the Korean Peninsula, calls for the creation of a Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, and collaborating to stanch the climate crisis can also provide the occasion for U.S.-Chinese and Japanese-Korean-Chinese trust building and diplomatic cooperation.

Our peace movements and potential tactical allies such as Colin Powell’s former Chief of Staff Lawrence Wilkerson to the CATO Institute in the U.S. are also critical resources. They are urging the closure and withdrawal from the hundreds of U.S. military bases and installations that encircle China and the reduction of military spending.

Our movements need to challenge the gross human rights violations on both sides of the Pacific: concentration camps, family separations, record number of imprisoned people, and assaults on freedom of thought and speech on both shores of the Pacific. Yet, as with 1980s détente and Obama’s Iran diplomacy, our first imperative must be avoiding a catastrophic and potentially nuclear war.

**Possible Elements of Asia-Pacific Common Security Diplomacy**

Ending the U.S.-Chinese trade war is a first priority. With face saving cover, the U.S. should suspend all tariffs in exchange for China committing to substantive negotiations to guarantee an end to intellectual property theft, enforced technology transfers and fair market access. More importantly, both sides should commit to substantive negotiations to address the structural economic imbalances: domestic economic inequalities, wage suppression, near unlimited credit and deficit spending which are major drivers of global economic instability and the climate crisis.

Means must be found to reduce the military confrontations and systems in Asia and the Pacific. This could include:

* + Cancellation of all provocative military exercises and creation of crisis management systems – including increased military to military consultations
  + Concluding a code of conduct among nations with claims to the South China Sea, with a parallel process addressing other regional territorial disputes
  + Step by step negotiations for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and for a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. A first step would be declaration of the end to the Korean War, commitments to negotiation of peace treaty to replace the Armistice, and an end to missile “tests”
  + Agreement not to unilaterally alter Taiwan’s status
  + Significant reduction of foreign military bases, including the South China Sea islands militarized by China and U.S. bases that ring China
  + Significant reduction of missile forces and so-called missile defenses
  + Resumption of arms reduction negotiations between U.S. and Russia and including China
  + Commitments to reduce military spending
* The Japanese government and society must sincerely face and apologize for its brutal wars, occupations and abuses inflicted across East Asia. It should recognize the DPRK to better engage in negotiations and seek common ground with South Korea to resolve their territorial dispute over the Dokdo/Takeshima island.

**Russia Must Be Engaged**

Adding to the complexity of Common Security negotiations is the reality of Russia as a Eurasian and Pacific power.

As George Kennan predicted, U.S. violation of the Bush/Baker – Gorbachev agreement providing for German reunification on the condition that NATO not move an inch closer to Moscow has been a disaster. Russia’s history of suffering devastating invasions from the West helps to explain its military and nuclear modernizations, its intervention in Ukraine, its support for right-wing governments in Europe, its interventions in the 2016 U.S. election, and its joint military exercises with the PLA.

Common Security in relation to Russia, means abandoning the dream of NATO expansion to Georgia and Ukraine, the vision of a Fort Trump in Poland, and the increasing militarization of the Nordic nations. It also means conceding that the shelf life of U.S. dominance over Europe as a western toehold on the geopolitically strategic Eurasian heartland has expired.

There are alternatives to NATO which can also provide models for Asia-Pacific Common Security negotiations, among them the Helsinki process and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Other elements must include:

* Restoration of the INF Treaty and extension of the New START Treaty combined with efforts to bring China and other nuclear powers into these treaties.
* A universal halt in deployment of new nuclear weapons and their delivery systems
* Eliminating launch on warning systems and first strike nuclear doctrines
* Credible steps toward fulfilling the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty’s obligation for good faith negotiations for the complete elimination of nuclear arsenals
* Reaffirmation and updating the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty
* Multi-lateral negotiations to reduce the risks of attacks on computer technologies and networks, especially those of nuclear-armed states.
* Fulfillment of the provisions of the Minsk II agreement

Finally, we cannot ignore India. Its annexation of much of Kashmir increases the danger that miscalculations could lead to a devasting Indo-Pakistani war.. Ways must be found to identify common interests and to negotiate a just solution to these deep wounds in the human fabric.

In concluding, let me say that I have no illusions about the pursuit and defense of imperial and autocratic power. That said, we know that we must struggle for human survival and justice, and that change – often unexpected – is the constant. Proverbs teaches us that “A people without a vision will perish.” And as Margaret Mead preached,we must “never doubtthat a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

1. Michael T. Klare. “The United States is Already at War with China”, the Nation. February 19, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-us-is-already-at-war-with-china/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Michael T. Klare “Pentagon Plans for Three-Front ‘Long War’ Against China and Russia”, TomDispatch, April 3, 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Jason Gutierrez. “U.S. Checks manila As China Extends Reach”, New York Times, July 17, 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hans M. Kristensen & Mark Korda. “Chinese nuclear forces, 2019, Bulletin of the AtoSeemic Scientists, Volume 75,2019: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2019.1628511> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ## Graham Allison. Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?. HMH Books. New York, 2017

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ho-fung Hung. The China Boom: Why China Will Not Rule the World, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See Odd Arne Westad, “The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a Nw Cold War?” and Kurt M. Campbell and Jacke Sullivan, “Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China”, Foreign Affairs, September/October, 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. # “Trump Says China Badly Wants Deal, U.S. Open to Calm Negotiation”, *Bloomberg News*, August 25, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-26/china-firmly-opposes-u-s-trade-war-escalation-liu-says>

   [↑](#endnote-ref-8)