



14th Giri Deshinkar Memorial Lecture- US- China Relations in the Era of Donald Trump and Xi Jinping by Dr. Elizabeth C. Economy

Speaker: Dr. Elizabeth C. Economy

Chair: Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies

Date: 6 July 2020

Venue: Zoom Meeting

The 14th Giri Deshingkar Memorial Lecture took place on the 6th of July, in collaboration with the CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), and with The Print serving as media partner. The GDML series began in 2001, following the death of Dr. Deshingkar, former director of ICS, as well as CSDS, with several accolades to his name as a regular contributor to pioneering interdisciplinary research, peace studies, development, and nuclear disarmament. Responsible for mentoring a new generation of China scholars in India in the mid 1980s-90s, he was known by several in his field as an original and distinguished scholar, and an important voice in independent thinking, in the words of former CSDS Director Dr. Kothari.

The lecture began with a tribute to the scholarship of Dr. Deshingkar by ICS Director Ambassador Ashok Kantha, Chair of the lecture, followed by an introduction to the life and work of Dr. Deshingkar by CSDS Fellow Dr. Awadhendra Sharan. Providing the lecture for the prestigious occasion was Dr. Elizabeth C. Economy, the C.V. Starr Senior Fellow and Director for Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Her most recent book, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, (Oxford University Press, 2018) was shortlisted for the 2019 Lionel Gelber Prize for the best non-fiction book in English on foreign affairs. She is also the author of the award-winning *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future* (Cornell University Press, 2004; 2nd edition, 2010), and *By All Means Necessary: How China's Resource Quest is Changing the World* (Oxford University Press, 2014), co-authored with Michael Levi.

The theme of the lecture, on US-China relations in the time of Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, was dedicated to examining the shift in US-China relations following the retirement of the

Obama and Den Xiaoping governments, wherein the strategic policy of the US towards China shifted from an Engage-but-Hedge policy to the direction of Compete, Combat and Contain. Dr. Economy began the lecture by positing four aspects that marked, through tangible examples, the newer shift in US-China relations beginning in 2015.

The first aspect could be seen as Xi Jinping's leadership marking a more individualistic, one-man driven political system, as opposed to Den Xiaoping's form of more collective leadership. An example provided by Dr. Economy was the Anti-Corruption law introduced by the former. Research at Harvard University points out that over 40% of the leaders arrested as per the Anti-Corruption law were opponents of Xi Jinping's party.

A second shift pointed out was the re-assertion of the CPC in everyday discourses, and the lives of the people and the economy, as seen in the systems of mass surveillance put in place by the government, the growing presence of the question of privacy, as raised by Robin Lee, the social credit system, and the application of the same to MNCs, with over 300 metrics of evaluation that primarily centre around CPC preferences.

A third shift pointed out was the network of regulations and restrictions put in place in China, an important example of which was the limiting of foreign engagement with endeavours such as Made in China initiative of 2015, as well as moving the responsibility of foreign NGOs from the Ministry of Civil Society to the Ministry of Public Security. A fourth shift pointed out was the more expansive foreign economic policy of Xi Jinping as opposed to the more low-laying policy of Den Xiaoping, marked by China staking a more assertive claim of sovereignty over the South China Sea and Taiwan, growing concerns over China's political activities in the US, and the rapidly changing nature of the BRI.

Dr. Economy went on to further examine the two trends in the Trump-led US government in the wake of the Xi Jinping era, the first being the President himself, who possesses a narrower focus on trade, trade with North Korea, and a very reactionary combatting towards China, with little to no concern over global development. The second trend comprises of several key stakeholder within the governmental structure, who possess and attempt to develop a strong sense of global cooperation and diplomatic alliances facing up against China. Developments on this end can be marked by the US' efforts in freeing up the Indo-Pacific, establishing the Blue Dot Network, easing MNC licensing, and urging countries to look more closely at their BRI agreements in order to prevent debt later. Even as Trump pulls out from the WHO, close leadership within the US lead to larger changes in the system of multilateral institutions, such as the successful combatting of Chinese efforts to introduce the BRI in several UN bills.

Dr. Economy pointed out the US effort to maintain a democratic front, as seen in collaborations with Taiwan, and the larger trend of decoupling marking the worst moment in US-China relations since Tiananmen, with Covid-19 only proving to the US further that China may not be trusted, even as the US attempts to lead the world order again, in order to not lead towards the escalation of a cold-war situation with China.

Several questions were asked by a distinguished number of guests, the first being by Jyoti Malhotra, the National and Strategic Affairs Editor at The Print, who enquired on the topic of growing tension between India and China, and what this may spell for India-US relations, with Dr. Economy answering with the US' cognizance of India's delicate position due to its relations with Russia, as well as challenges between India and China with regard to the Galwan border conflict, as well as control over the Indo Pacific. However, she asserted, the US seeks a commonality with India on the principle basis of them both being democratic nations. Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, former National Security Advisor, asked a question on the possibility of China globally reverting to a more harmonious global relationship, with Dr. Economy pointing out the difficulty of the same, even as several voices of dissent existed within China and abroad. Questions followed pointed on the Russia-China relationship affecting the terms of US globally, the idea of public intellectualism and its possibility as affective activism in the era of Xi Jinping and the possibility of Chinese economic hegemony, due to China's trend of commercial success but a lack of deep innovation, the primary hub of which remains the US.

The lecture closed with a warm token of thanks extended to Dr. Economy by Director Ashok Kantha.