

普京访华后，未来的中美关系将会走向何方？

Zhang Zhikun: Putin Visits China. Whither China-US Relations?

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(Pǔjīng fǎng huá hòu, wèilái de zhōng měi guānxì jiāng huì zǒuxiàng héfāng?)

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Series Editor's Note

President Vladimir Putin of Russia recently concluded a two-day state visit to the People's Republic of China, from 16-17 May 2024. In a rare show of affection, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping hugged the visiting Russian leader – this was the 43rd meeting between the two “dear friends” in 12 years. In the West, this growing Xi-Putin camaraderie is now being feared as a serious threat. On the other hand, most Chinese welcome Beijing-Moscow embracing each other as an effective “soft counter-balance” against the US-led suppression of China and Russia. This further explains the reason for an average of 4-5 op-ed commentaries daily in the Chinese media on the dangers of the US target to contain China, and Washington’s “Obama-Trump-Biden” Cold War mentality of treating China as a “strategic competitor”. This translation of the Chinese commentary by Zhang Zhikun, a leading and influential member of China’s leftist intelligentsia, is only one among numerous such writings.

Summary

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s successful China visit has further strengthened friendly relations between Beijing and Moscow. At the same time, the Biden administration has imposed large-scale and wide-ranging tariff

increases on China, which has led to a further deterioration in relations between China and the United States. These two extraordinary developments happening simultaneously are making people wonder: what is the future of Sino-US relations going to be like?



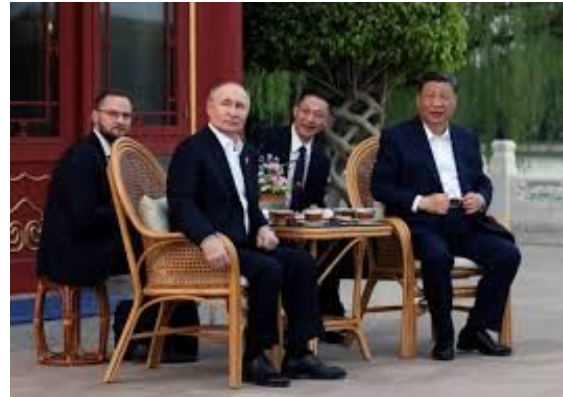
A rare show of affection.
Source: *Bloomberg Politics*
(@bloombergpolitics)

The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be happening with the United States simultaneously carrying out its policy of “strategic competition” against China. As per the situation today, that things will unfold in this fashion is an absolute certainty. Which is to say, as the Chinese people are fully committed to realising the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the hegemonic forces led by the US are using all their resources to launch strategic competition with China and are scheming to contain China. Hegemony has become a lingering influence on the path of China’s growth and progress – a “partner” who will always be entangled with China like a shadow.

Especially at a time when the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has ushered in several important milestones, where will China-US relations go? This is an important issue that people are concerned about.

It is understandable that people are seeking answers to such a question, because the two major strategic nodes on China's future path forward are not that far away. According to the plan, China's socialist modernisation will be basically realised in 2035. That is only a little more than a decade away. The vast majority of Chinese people today will witness it with their own eyes; in 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country will be built into a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilised, harmonious, and beautiful modern socialist country. And an overwhelming majority of Chinese people living today will be able to take part in it. In other words, these are major historical moments that we will soon usher in. And when the two major strategic moments of 2035 and 2049 arrive in quick succession, will the United States congratulate and pay tribute to China? Or will the US suppress China so hard to prevent it from realising the rejuvenation goal, making it a life and death struggle for every Chinese?

To answer the question, it might help to explore the following issues.



Tea at Zhongnanhai
Source: In-Cyprus

First, How will Competition Develop?

There are people in China who do not agree with the US administrations' definition of Sino-US relations. They either deny or have an evasive attitude that there is "strategic competition" between China and the United States and believe that this concept cannot be used to define or explain Sino-US relations. There are some Chinese people who do not deny that "strategic competition" is impossible, but they believe this competition should be "healthy", should be controlled, should draw boundaries and bottom lines, should be full of goodwill, should uphold good wishes for each other, etc. Thus placing all kinds of restrictions and regulations on the "strategic competition" designed and

launched by the hegemon.

But unfortunately, none of the above-mentioned Chinese people's claims and wishes actually count. Because "strategic competition" is the product of hegemonic group leadership, not the result of Sino-US cooperative consultation and communication. So, it's not that the United States won't attack you if you don't want to be attacked. It's just like the wishes and needs of the "wolf" cannot be controlled by the "sheep"; always placing its wishes on the "wolf" is what is the sad thing about the "sheep."

The characteristics of the United States' "noisy" Strategic Competition against China at present is not mere rhetorical display, but substantive suppression that has no restraint, is comprehensive and in-depth, is increasing layer by layer, pressing step by step, and constantly advancing in degree. If this trend continues, the "strategic competition" between China and the United States will inevitably go global, and will overwhelm everything and become the main line of global strategy, becoming the general outline and core of Sino-US relations. Under such a development direction or trend, forget the talk about the so-called "healthy" "strategic competition," instead the so-

called "control" and "guardrails" rhetoric will become even more deceptive.

Second, to What Extent will Sino-US Relations Deteriorate?

Under the "strategic competition" with China that the United States cannot give up, the future development trend of Sino-US relations can only be increasingly downward. As long as they are not pretending to be blind, anyone can see clearly. But this has not stopped some people from having fantasies and illusions. They still hope that Sino-US relations can have a so-called "bottoming out". For this reason, such people in China have been making a lot of noise, often proclaiming that Sino-US relations are getting better and better, but every time their claim turns out to be nothing. It turns out that all this hubbub was a mirage fuelled by the burning desires of some Chinese people. Of course, their efforts are not lacking in this. China has also made great efforts to push Sino-US relations to "get back on track" by using the leverage in its hands. However, the results have always been an attempt to "catch the reflection of the moon in the water." Moreover, even though Sino-US relations may not be experiencing a straight fall, they are actually rolling down in waves at an accelerating speed.

If this trend continues, to what extent will Sino-US relations deteriorate?

People can draw inferences from both history and the present-day reality. For example, in the history of the Lusitania disaster, relations between the United States and Germany had seriously deteriorated before this incident. Therefore, the United States took this incident as an opportunity to declare war on Germany and entered the ranks of World War I. Then there is the example of the relationship between the United States and Japan before the Pearl Harbour incident. At the time, the United States imposed a comprehensive embargo on Japan, which caused Japanese militarists to take desperate measures and plan a new war to get out of the predicament. The latest case in reality is the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and the post-Cold War NATO expansion against Russia. There was a situation when the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had been hovering on the edge of war, with only one fuse missing. The relationship between the United States and Russia has also been experiencing constant crises, successively. There were armed conflicts in Yugoslavia, Syria and other places, and

finally a big explosion occurred here in Ukraine, which is still developing.

These cases all have one thing in common, that is, the United States will push the other side into a blind corner, and then trigger a direct war.

It is difficult to say whether the future Sino-US relations will repeat the same mistakes now, but two things are certain: first, the U.S. authorities' plans for the future of Sino-U.S. relations will mostly copy past methods and refer to past cases; second, it is (the US) hegemony who are clamouring for war against China.

Therefore, for the future Sino-US relations, the obvious conclusion naturally is: it will not get better, and there is no possibility of "getting back on track"; but it is entirely possible to repeat the historical past, that is, either a direct war/conflict will occur, or there will be an "on the edge of war" like situation. There is no third pattern.

Third, Multiple Future Scenarios

So, how will Sino-US relations shape in the future? We might as well combine the two major strategic nodes and make some predictions and speculations based on the

matter.

(1) On the Taiwan issue: The United States continues to arm Taiwan to undermine China's reunification. By 2035, the situation of Sino-US relations in the Taiwan Strait may return to the state of the 1950s and 1960s, that is, the United States stationed troops in Taiwan and patrolled and blocked Taiwan Strait; by 2049, it may return to the situation in 1949, that is, the United States went all out to support the Taiwan authorities to confront the mainland and engage in a life-and-death contest.

(2) On economic and trade issues: The Sino-US trade war continues to develop. By 2035, the United States may close the entire North American market to China, cutting off China's largest foreign economic and trade market space; by 2049, it may push NATO further close to China; the European Union and Latin America have closed their markets, hitting the Chinese economy more forcefully.

(3) Politically and strategically, the United States continues to hold high the banner of democracy and freedom. By 2035, there may be clear democratic camps and authoritarian camps, and the curtain of the new Cold War will come to an end; by 2049, there will be a Chinese-

American camp. A frozen period in American politics and strategy.

(4) Militarily, the United States will continue to increase the strength and intensity of its military containment of China, and on this basis, it will take relevant actions to cause substantial damage. One possibility is that by 2035 or before, if China has achieved or is about to achieve its established strategic goals, the "hegemon group" may take desperate risks and trigger a war against China under various possible excuses and forms; among them, there will definitely be a war in the Taiwan Strait. It is a high probability that if China is forced to give up reunification due to the US military defence, the "Chinese Dream" will naturally come to a naught; there may also be a new ocean pirate fleet, and a large number of modern versions of Drake will appear and attack China, and destroy China's ocean transportation channels; at the same time, a comprehensive and profound strategic competition is unfolding on the earth and in outer space beyond the earth.

Of course, all the above are only possibilities (and bad possibilities). Let us not forget possible things can also become impossible. The key is the interaction and competition between China and the United

States, and who can really seize the opportunity, win the initiative, reverse or control the development of strategic situations.



Limits of Friendship
Source: *Financial Times*

However, what is certain is that future global war and peace will depend to a large extent on Sino-US relations. The quality of Sino-US relations will, to a considerable extent, determine the strategic outlook of the world. Taking into account the size, scale and destructive capabilities of China and the United States, the future Sino-US relations may also be in a third state besides war and peace, that is, sub-peace and sub-war. In this state, the United States will inevitably once again divide the sphere of hegemony and form a unified camp to attack China; but will China continue to maintain its solitary, seemingly detached non-alignment and non-confrontational attitude? Or, will China and Russia join forces to launch an international counter-

hegemony? The united front may have to make a fateful choice.

In view of the above analysis, China must not only manage the current Sino-US relations well, but also make plans for future Sino-US relations.

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No. 43 Mar 2024	Encountering ChatGPT “Hurricane”: How to Make it “Accountable”? Part - II	Madhurendra Jha
No. 42 Feb 2024	Encountering ChatGPT “Hurricane”: How to Make it “Accountable”?	Madhurendra Jha
No. 41 Nov 2023	Wu Xinbo: ‘Easing’ or ‘Improving’ Sino-US Relations?	Hemant Adlakha
No. 40 Sep 2023	Lu Jingsheng: On Tsinghua University Professor Yan Xuetong saying “Patriotism need not be taught”	Cherry Hitkari
No. 39 Aug 2023	Bid to setup groundwork for Blinken, a US State Department Senior official makes a low-key visit to China. Is US having a change of heart and ‘seeking peace’?	Chhavi Raj
No. 38 Jun 2023	How Difficult is it to Implement a “Monthly Pay System” for Migrant Workers?	Snigdha Konar
No. 37 Jun 2023	Why can't the US-Japan-Dutch semiconductor agreement contain China?	Prashant Kaushik
No. 36 Jun 2022	Foxconn, an iPhone Foundry in Zhenzhou, China is sending its staff to India to train Indians, should Beijing start worrying?	Hemant Adlakha

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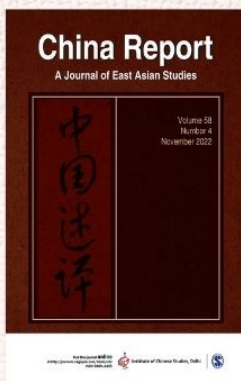


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