

[John Ross]

Right. Well, we've heard a wide range of expressions of aspects of the situation in China, from which I think everybody outside China will learn a great deal. And the final speaker that we're going on to is to Helena Pobbit, who is president of Just World Educational.

Helena is the author or co-author of eight books on issues touching on US foreign policy, in particular in West Asia. The best place to follow her views regularly is at helenacobin.substract.com. So with great pleasure, Helena, please.

[Helena Cobban]

Thank you, John, for that lovely introduction and for having shared with everybody this really wide ranging and thought provoking collection of views today. Thanks, obviously, to the No Cold War Coalition and to the Chongyang Institute for having brought this together. I have huge appreciation for all the rich contributions I've heard.

Too many to start listing them, that would use up all my time. I want to focus a little on the constructive and thought provoking analysis that was shared by Professor Wang Wen at the beginning and comment on that. But I want to note also that this summit meeting between Presidents Xi and Trump is happening at a truly historic juncture over the long haul of, let's say, six centuries of human history, which have been centuries that saw the growth and consolidation of the hegemony over world affairs by a handful of small states perched on the extreme west coast of Europe and their offspring, the United States and Israel and, of course, Australia and New Zealand. That era of Western hegemony over world affairs is now coming to an end. So that's why I feel fairly optimistic and excited about the prospects for this, because those centuries of Western hegemony were truly disastrous for many of the peoples of the Global South.

In China, of course, you had the century of humiliation, but indigenous peoples throughout the Global South suffered terribly also. So the end of Western hegemony has been hastened in the past few years by the smart resistance to it, shown by the peoples of Iran, Palestine, Yemen and Lebanon. But the crumbling of Western hegemony was already underway before 2023.

Professor Wang Wen noted the end of Western hegemony and he explored what might replace it. He talked about a multipolar system, and I like the way he described that with the parallel bilateral relations among the three poles. However, I prefer the term multinodal to multipolar because I don't think that what we have at these junction points are poles as such more like nodes because everybody is so interconnected and it's more than just the three.

So authority within the multinodal system is more widely distributed than just the three poles. I would also describe the system that's emerging as multivalent in that the competition is not only in military terms, but also and mainly perhaps in economic, technical, financial and other terms, other arenas of human interaction. More immediately regarding this historical juncture, this historic upcoming meeting between Presidents Trump and Xi comes at a time when Trump is facing significant political opposition here at home, as has been noted by several of the speakers.

His approval rating in the public opinion polls is roughly 32%, which is I think a historic low certainly for many, many years in this country and the midterm elections are coming up on November 7th, 5th, 7th, one of those days, early November, let's say. This summit meeting and the broader US-China interactions are very timely and necessary because in a time of uncertainty here in the United States, there may be a strong temptation to blame outsiders and to ramp up Sinophobia and Xenophobia in general, especially well, in trade terms that President Trump has already tried to do, notably unsuccessfully last year, but across the board. However, right now, Americans have clearly seen the immense costs imposed by the Israeli-US attacks on Iran.

So military adventures no longer have the kind of temptation that they might have had, say last year. The costs of this completely illegal and unprovoked US-Israeli attack on Iran have been imposed first and foremost on the Iranian people and also on peoples around the whole world because of the economic disruptions. And that includes the people here in the United States, where we see the price of gasoline, the price of diesel, virtually all the freight in this country is distributed by diesel engines, either on roads or on railways.

So the costs are very, very tangible at the petrol pump and in the grocery stores. Thus far, thank God we have not had a lot of military personnel lost, although certainly the numbers of military personnel who have perished in this war is far greater than what the government is telling us. But already people around this country are seeing the extreme costs of war, as are people around the world.

There is a very reputable public opinion polling company in this country called the Pew Research Center. And they have been tracing public attitudes toward China for more than 20 years now. And I was looking recently at a graph of how they tracked US public attitudes toward China.

And I found that for many years between 2006 and 2023, which was a time of China's rise in the world economy, the unfavorable attitudes amongst Americans toward China rose pretty steadily over those years. But since 2023, public attitudes toward China have started to improve. That is really important to note.

And especially this is happening among younger people. So we have a lot to work with in terms of getting out there and explaining to publics here in the United States that China is not our enemy. It's actually essential for Americans to cooperate with the people of China in meeting all these massive global challenges we have, specifically the climate challenge, which we are all suffering from.

I know our friends in China have been having terrible effects from the collapse of the glacier in Tibet and from winds and hurricanes and monsoons across much of the rest of China. We are also suffering from climate effects here, which will probably get worse over the coming weeks because of the massive El Nino that is about to come at us from the Pacific. We need to collaborate.

And also on the threats from artificial intelligence, as President Xi has noted, this is a global threat that needs to be cooperated on. So I want to conclude here, just by noting how welcome I find it that we have so many younger researchers and analysts participating in this forum. I think John Ross and I are probably the oldest people here.

I'm just thinking back 50 years to when I was a young journalist in Lebanon in the 1970s. As a journalist, I covered two hot wars in West Asia, both the civil war in Lebanon and the start of the Iran-Iraq war, which as we know, went on for eight years in the 1980s. I've also done strategic studies and looked at the Cold War, the US-Soviet Cold War, and the costs.

I mean, those of us who have participated or rather witnessed directly the costs of hot war, fighting war, understand those very directly. Those of us who've studied the costs of Cold War understand those costs also. And they have been very articulately expressed by many of the participants here.

So I just want to conclude by saying that among all the generations, my generation, the generations represented here, the generation of my grandchildren, for the sake of the coming generations, we have to avoid Cold War, we have to defuse tensions, and we have to find ways to cooperate worldwide, and especially between our two important nations. Thank you, John. Thank you, everybody.