

China Development Forum 2021

China on a New Journey of Modernisation

08:30-09:10 20 March 2021

Plenary Session 1

50 Years of the US-China Relations

Moderator

LU Mai, Vice Chairman, China Development Research Foundation (CDRF);
Secretary General, China Development Forum (CDF)

Speakers

Henry Kissinger, Chairman, Kissinger Associates Inc.; Former Secretary of State, USA

Mushahid Hussain, Chairman, Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Parliament of Pakistan

ZHANG Baijia, Former Vice President, Party History Research Center of CPC

Robert Rubin, Co-Chair Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations; Former Treasury Secretary, USA

FU Ying, Chairperson, Center for International Security and Strategy, Tsinghua University (CISS)

Key points

- The rekindling of US-China relations 50 years ago was one of the defining moments of the past half century.
- The US and China will always have fundamental differences but there are many areas in which they can cooperate, namely in containing the pandemic, climate change and nuclear non-proliferation.
- As the world's leading powers, cooperation between the US and China will be essential for global stability and prosperity.

Synopsis

Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971 was one of the most pivotal moments in the post-war era, bringing about a tectonic shift in the global balance of power. Now, 50 years later, the US and China retain many of the same ideological and cultural differences they did back then, but the stakes of

non-cooperation have increased substantially.

Dr. Kissinger, then US Secretary of State, and Mushahid Hussain, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee for the Parliament of Pakistan, began with remarks on the diplomatic steps the US and Pakistan took to initiate the secret meeting between Dr Kissinger and Zhou Enlai that would rekindle formal diplomatic relations after 25 years of hostilities. Leaders on all sides fully grasped of the magnitude of the impending visit, and despite their competing worldviews, were able to set aside their differences and recognize the importance of ensuring productive and meaningful diplomatic relations in the future.

The past 50 years saw the ups and downs of the China-US relationship. The recent high-level dialogue between Chinese and American officials in Alaska exposed the increasing mutual distrust between both sides. However, as all panelists agreed, there is no room for any talk of containment or a new Cold War, for global peace and prosperity depends on amicable relations between the two powers. Looking back now over the past 50 years, it is remarkable how far China and the US have come since that first meeting, and now the two countries are so heavily entwined that any moves to decouple would be detrimental to both their interest.

The ideological differences between the US and China 50 years ago have not dissipated, yet today there are more opportunities than ever before where both sides can, and must, cooperate. Containing the spread of COVID-19, combatting climate change and working towards nuclear non-proliferation are just some of the many complex challenges facing the world today. Close cooperation between the US and China will be essential if these issues are to be overcome. The channels for dialogue and cooperation are also far more sophisticated and numerous now than they were back then, not least including CDF which serves as a valuable platform for the exchange of ideas and understanding.

As the world's leading powers, cooperation between the US and China is essential for global stability. Fu Ying, Chairperson of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University, stressed that both sides have a historic responsibility to increase mutual understanding and work together on areas of shared interest. While there will always be ups and downs in the bilateral relationship, both parties must remain calm and objective in order to

ensure future global stability and prosperity.

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