**Session:** US-China Strategic (Dis)trust

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, April 23, 2014 / 10:30-11:45

**Speakers:** Douglas Paal, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Moderator)

Bonnie Glaser, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Martin Jacques, University of Cambridge

Andrew Scobell, RAND Corporation

Yan Xuetong, Tsinghua University

Ms. Bonnie Glaser argues that mistrust in international relations does matter, even though not all forms of mistrust hamper cooperation or lead to war. Certain types of mistrust are relatively inconsequential, and allies can mistrust each other on certain issues, but mistrust can have serious implications in interpretations of long-term strategies. For example, China mistrusts the US, as it perceives that America seeks to undermine China’s communist party rule. On the other hand, the US mistrusts China due to perceived efforts by the Chinese government to expel US forces in the Asia Pacific and alter the post-war international system.

Dr. Martin Jacques contends that if the US is to successfully manage its relationship with a rising China, it must embrace “strategic accommodation.” The US and China can make arrangements that satisfy both of their needs within the context of a changing international order, just as the rising US and declining British Empire were able to do in the 20th century. Thus, the WWI analogy of rising and falling powers is unsuitable to explain the current dynamic between the US and China. After the Cold War ended, a singular system emerged in which the US and China are currently very important players, so both countries have a profound interest in prosperity, growth and the success of the system.

Dr. Andrew Scobell highlights significant reservoirs between the US and China due to cultural stereotypes and mirror imaging. Although shared national interests are important components of bilateral cooperation, they are not sufficient for constructing an enduring, robust relationship. Cultural stereotypes include Chinese views of the US as a typically aggressive and expansionist western power, while the US often sees the Communist Party of China as the antithesis to the freedom, democracy and human rights the US seeks to promote. Mirror imaging involves mutual misunderstandings that lead to simplistic binary interpretations of the other side. Together, cultural stereotypes and mirror imaging yield an “empathy deficit” and mutual mistrust.

Professor Yan Xuetong argues that although many policymakers believe that mutual trust is necessary, so many rival powers throughout history have been able to cooperate without mutual trust. For example, the US and Russians cooperated in WWII despite mistrust, and China and the US cooperated in the 1980s and even today without mutual trust. Mistrust and distrust are actually ideological issues, and since China and the US cannot change each other’s ideologies, it is much more important to find shared interests as the basis of cooperation. It is also important to increase mutual understanding, but then again, sometimes the more you know about people, the less you trust them. The Chinese have a famous proverb to this effect: “Because of mutual misunderstanding, men and women fall in love, and because of full understanding, they get a divorce.”