

Session: The U.S.-China Strategic Competition

Date/Time: April 24, 2018 / 14:45-16:15

Rapporteur:

Cho Eun A, The Asan Forum

Moderator:

Chung Jae-Ho, Seoul National University

Speakers:

Dino Patti Djalal, Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia

Aaron Friedberg, Princeton University

François Godement, European Council on Foreign Relations

Hugh White, Australian National University

Paul Wolfowitz, American Enterprise Institute

Session Sketch:

Plenary Session II: The U.S.-China Strategic Competition began with the moderator contextualizing an “era of crisis,” marked by a rise of illiberal forces, a return to the nation-state system, trends toward a more closed regionalism, and growing securitization.

In describing U.S.-China relations, Dino Patti Djalal stated that their competition is not about ideology—as U.S.-Soviet competition during the Cold War had been—but about influence and access in the Asia-Pacific region. For countries in the region, this competition is not necessarily problematic, unless it becomes a zero-sum, strategic competition.

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Aaron Friedberg described the U.S. policy toward China as a mixed strategy that combines both engagement and balancing. This strategy has three objectives: 1) incorporating China into the existing international system; 2) pushing China toward economic liberalization; and 3) pushing China toward political reform. According to Friedberg, engagement has not led China to liberalize economically or politically, calling into question the salience of the existing U.S. policy toward China.

François Godement argued that the key question concerning China is not whether it will become more like the West, but rather, whether the West will become more like China. For Europe, identifying a solution that preserves the multilateral order is crucial, as is finding a consensus on the rules—or the process of changing those rules.

Hugh White asserted that the U.S.-China competition is caused by a historic shift in the distribution of wealth and power from the west to the rest. Unless the United States is serious about pushing back against growing Chinese clout, order in Asia will likely change. The debate, therefore, should not be about how we can preserve the old liberal international order, but how we can help shape the new order that China will seek to introduce.

Paul Wolfowitz compared the rise of China to that of Russia and Iran in their own regional spheres of influence. These rising regional hegemons have two things in common: 1) their leaders define their strategic goals in terms of their imperial past, and 2) their internal domestic structures are already imperial. Though they

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do not pose a global ideological threat, they may grow closer to confront and drive out the United States from their respective regional spheres.

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