

**All Eyes on China:  
Robert Daly Lecture Summary:  
By AARNAV SHETH**

“All Eyes on China,” a lecture given by the director at the Wilson Center’s Kissinger Institute on Sino-U.S. relations, provided great insight into the United States’ current relationship with China. It all boiled down to one idea: things are bad now, but they can get worse without diligent diplomatic efforts.

During the recent San Francisco summit, the United States and China agreed to a new foundation for U.S.-China relations -- jointly avoiding war. Before delving further into contemporary relations, Daly provided context for the current position.

The United States initially “cozied up” to China over their shared views about the Soviet Union. Shortly after, the period of engagement brought a great working relationship with China. The three main reasons for this period were to help the people, make money, and encourage more global interaction with China. However, the era of engagement is now over. In recent years, the United States is now in a contemporary “Cold War” with its Eastern adversary. While many may use gentler terms like peaceful coexistence, Daly insisted that Cold War terminology is most accurate. Luckily, the pair of countries appear to be more annoyed at each other than alarmed at this moment.

Daly went on to discuss the United States’ definition of stability in the context of Sino-U.S. relations. He discussed how the United States wishes to continue what it has been doing to establish and defend a liberal world order, and that China wants the United States to “shut up and go away.” He said China is not trying to dominate the world, but rather to get what it wants to deal with its internal issues, and when the U.S. gets in its way, there is conflict. Because of these conflicting ideals, Daly believes that the thaw in tensions will not last long.

Circling back to the idea of a Cold War between U.S. and China, Daly specified that this case is different from the previous Cold War with Russia because Russia wasn’t as integrated with the U.S. as China is today. He said both countries are fragile superpowers, with China facing looming economic challenges, demographic crises, and issues with pollution. In reaction to these issues, he said China wants to mend relations with the U.S. so they can focus on their primary domestic concerns. He said the U.S.’ weak point is political polarization, and fluctuating policies between presidential administrations often lead to strains in diplomatic relationships. Similar to the Cold War mentality, both countries are trying to expand their global influence and beat the other, while trying to diminish the influence of the other.

Daly raised a lack of tact in current U.S. diplomacy with China. During his time serving in foreign service, any mention of Taiwan in an unflattering light was met with correction by fellow U.S. foreign service workers in China. However, Daly believes that diplomats are not as careful as they used to be and that they may now call Taiwan a country, much to the annoyance of Chinese officials.

Daly said China believes they are geo-strategically innocent, and that the U.S. is the aggressor. This idea is important because it involves competing over different ideas of “human good.” He believes that the center of our competition with China is over the current world order, and that it isn’t about which country wins, but rather what set of ideas wins. He related this to a concept within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. He detailed that Xi’s point of view removes the top

component of the pyramid, self actualization, and that humans should be satisfied with wealth, health, and other aspects of life, instead.

Daly concluded with a discussion of what each country needs in order to achieve the main goal of keeping this Cold War cold. He believes that China needs to accommodate itself to modernity, which includes embracing enlightenment ideals like political pluralism. Furthermore, he made clear that China's motives aren't to rule the world, rather they want to fix their own problems and get what they desire economically. Similarly, he believes the United States needs to embrace the idea of multilateralism in order to pave the way for better diplomatic relations.

He ended with a question for all to ponder: Can either side change?

*Aarnav Sheth is a senior at Gulf Coast High School and a student intern with NCWA.*