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ON THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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**GEWIRTZ:** Well, why don't we start if the microphone is on? And welcome to all of you. I'm Paul Gewirtz, professor at Yale Law School, and also the director of our Paul Tsai China Center and I'm delighted we're doing this event. This event is part of a formal collaboration that our center has with the John Thornton China Center here at Brookings. It's been a very valuable collaboration, but this is the first in-person event we've had since the relaxation of the COVID restrictions, and it's wonderful to be here to see you and to see colleagues and friends.

The topic, as you know, is the United States, China, and Europe's different visions of the international order, and we have a group here that's ideally suited for that multisyllabic title. First and moderating the event is Ryan Hass, who has recently and splendidly been named the director of the John Thornton China Center here, and he's really a major figure in the field of U.S.-China relations. And then, sitting next to him is Susan Thornton, who is a senior fellow at the Paul Tsai China Center, and a profoundly important colleague for me and for all of us. And as you may know, she joined us after serving for over 25 years in the State Department and retiring with the title acting assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. And reflecting Chinese views — I will not say representing China, but reflecting views in China — is Professor Zha Daojiong, who is a distinguished professor at Peking University School of International Relations, and he also directs their center on the Global South. And perhaps not for the rest of the world, but for me, another very important fact is that he is currently a visiting scholar at our China Center. He's been in residence since August and just such a valuable colleague to have. And finally, again, not, not representing Europe, but reflecting the perspectives of Europe, we have Tara Varma, who is a visiting, a visiting fellow here at Brookings. But, prior to that, or and prior to that for quite some time, was the Paris director of the European Center on Foreign Relations. And so, we've got a terrific group. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Ryan Hass and look forward to hearing what everyone has to say.

**HASS:** Well, Paul, thank you for your introduction, but even more so for your leadership of the Yale-Brookings partnership. We've been very enriched by the collaboration and, and feel very rewarded to have you as a partner in today's event. As Paul mentioned, today's event is intended to look at where there is convergence and divergence in views between Europe, the United States, and China on the future of the international system. And we are going to forego opening presentations to jump right at the heart of these questions. And we're going to start with Susan. So, Susan, in a few sentences, using plain English, what is the international system? It's a subject of definitional imprecision. People invoke it often but rarely define what exactly it is that we're talking about.

**THORNTON:** And I have what, three minutes? So, yeah, I mean, I'm glad you used the term international system because that's the one that I guess I'm the most comfortable with trying to describe in

three sentences. You know, the the international system, I think what we're talking about, for those of us in this room in our discussion, is, you know, the system established after World War II, you know, designed to, in large part, try to prevent another cataclysmic conflict between major powers from breaking out, but also to protect smaller powers from predatory actions by larger powers. And, you know, it's a set of institutions and agreed rules to try to promote stability, prevent conflict. I mean, we had as part of the international system, laws of war that actually predate the setting up of the United Nations — the Geneva Conventions, Hague Conventions, etc. — but then with the founding of the U.N. after World War II, layers of institutions that are designed to try to preserve peace and try to promote stability. Of course, the international system also after World War II, part of the idea was to promote reconstruction, the financing for reconstruction of war-torn economies, and to promote commerce and development. And so we set up a number of institutions known as the Bretton Woods Institutions — the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO (World Trade Organization) — to try to facilitate this kind of global prosperity.

And I think, you know, there are a lot of questions about how well the system is working. One of the bedrock principles has been this principle of territorial integrity, which means that borders of internationally recognized sovereign states should not be changed through use of force, which was the principle that was well observed for, for most of the last 75 years and has done a good job, I think, in preventing inter-state conflict, but of course was violated very obviously and egregiously by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine. And Russia being a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, I think that has really kind of given rise to probably the panel we're having here today, which has shaken a lot of people's faith, I think, in the system. I mean, the U.S. has played an outsized role in this international system. We have provided the leadership, Pax Americana, of course, has provided a lot of the stability of the system through multiple alliance relationships and a lot of military deployments. We've also, I think, promoted global prosperity on the back of kind of open trade flows, open markets, and, and commerce, and financial flows, capital flows. So I think, you know, we have played a leadership role. I guess one of the things we're going to talk about is, is whether that is going to continue or whether that should change. My basic bottom line is that the international system has brought us an awful lot of good. It's being heavily criticized now, but we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

**HASS:** Well, thank you. We will get to the criticisms in a moment. But first, I want to give Zha Daojiong or Tara a chance to offer any additions or amendments to Susan's definition of what the international system is that we're talking about.

**DAOJIONG:** Does it need a new definition? If it's international, it's by nature evolutionary, by nature, it invites-- it has to accept contributions and contests of different views to be self-sustainable, I would think. I

don't have-- one point I would want to say that the international system is was, if we benchmark that with the U.N.-based system has served Chinese interests extremely well, and most of the principles, the core of the U.N. treaties are quite in line with the Chinese statement and the five principles of peaceful coexistence. Although that-- those five principles originated in India and Myanmar back in the fifties, but nevertheless the Chinese supported that. But there is, there is a bit of a nuance in the understanding. If you go back to historical studies, Zhōu Ēnlái would say, well, peaceful coexistence are not being translated into Chinese as gong cún. I don't-- not what many of you here speak Chinese. I don't need to write-- I don't have a board to write it. Now gong cún would be more in line with the Khrushchev reference to coexistence, meaning fine, you know, war would be an option between even major powers. Let's prepare for that if you look at the nuclear arms race. But the Chinese wording for peaceful coexistence is gòng chǔ we have differences, but nevertheless, we have to cohabit, you know, accept the reality that we are cohabiting one universe. And I would think that nuances often lost and to the extent partly because of the Cold War and partly because of the power of rhetoric, the sometimes nuance is lost in translation.

A third-- these are not a correction. Now, if you read some of the literature, especially in the media, there seems to be shock or uncompromising differences between Chinese and American preferences for the international system today. I don't think that is reflective of the realities you have what's set. You also have what's not set. I would invite more attention to looking at or examining Chinese views by asking the question: What are they benchmarking against, against which historical precedents, or against what kind of ideal? Rather than just taking some expressions at the superficial level, especially by accepting the translated works into English. Or, you know, we have the same challenge of having-- translating English or other foreign languages into Chinese. So the-- if I bring myself to some sort of closure at the beginning, I do not think, I do not believe there ought to be that kind of uncompromising rivalry either/or between China-United States, or for that matter, China and the rest of the world.

**HASS:** Well, we will get into this more later. But it is interesting that your comments suggest that China benefits and sees value in the international system as it's currently configured, which runs counter to some of the prevailing views in Washington today that suggest that the liberal nature of the international system is a direct threat to China, and China, therefore, is hostile towards it. But, but, Tara, how are you thinking about this?

**VARMA:** I would say the Europeans largely share the definition that Susan presented to us. The legal resolution of conflict is something that Europeans care very much about. The foundation of the European Union is a peace project. The idea that sworn enemies are supposed to overcome their differences, sometimes their hatred of one another, through trade, through cooperation. So I think the idea

that, actually, we have to work together in an international setting, people here call it the international order. Europeans like to call it the multilateral order, which is a bit of a semantic difference, but I think that's mostly what it is. I do think that with China, we have a bit more of a difference. In 2019, the European Commission came up with this idea of almost a holy trinity of what the European Union's relationship with China should be, which holds under systemic rival, competitor, and partner.

And under this idea of systemic rivalry, basically, there are two components of it. There is an internal element democracy versus autocracy. To put it plainly, different visions of how the economic system should work, different visions of whether civil society should play or not a role in how we work together. But there is also an external component to it, and that pertains to how we think of the international order. And so there are questions about the verification mechanisms that a number of people in China don't like. They-- what we, I would say, as Europeans and Americans have tried to push with these verification mechanisms, trying to build trust through a number of mechanisms. Ensuring that the more we know, the more protected we will be is something that a number of people in China push back against, saying, "Well, actually you're encroaching on our privacy, on our rights." And so, we're seeing this actually play out in a number of issues. One of the big issues right now is, of course, arms control. So we see how we're struggling to sometimes share s same vision. This being said, the third component of the trinity is that we want to partner with China. And so systemic rivalry doesn't mean that there should be no link, that there should be no cooperation. We need to think of a number of topics, particularly when it comes to the global commons, where there is absolutely space for us to cooperate. Actually, not only is there space, there is necessity for us to cooperate.

**HASS:** One-- go ahead.

**THORNTON:** I was just gonna say that I maybe neglected to mention in my definition — cause it wasn't that detailed — but I think Tara brings up this point about the tension in the international system between the principle of sovereignty, right? Noninterference in a country's internal affairs, which is a principle in the U.N. charter, but which is diametrically opposed to an intention with this notion that the international community has a responsibility to protect people anywhere in the international community from, you know, what is considered to be abuses from state power.

And then we've seen this tension playing out even-- I mean, I would say it's really come to a head in the, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union because these issues kept coming up, you know, responsibility to protect, from the U.N. in a case where there was a civil strife and, you know, attacks on minority groups, etc. But it comes up also in the in the realm of human rights, which is, you know, an issue also I think between the U.S. and China and Europe in the international system. And so, I mean, this is an

area that, you know, is constantly — and working on China and many other countries, I mean, not just China — but this is definitely at some of the heart of the tensions, I think, in the system that.

**DAOJIONG:** When this notion of systemic rivalry came out of EU rhetoric, most of the Chinese initial translations, I thought, got it wrong. Actually, I started to write a piece to correct it because they misunderstood that a systematic rivalry [-]. Now, what is that system? If there was a reservation or difference about that particular system, systemic difference, it's probably understood or feared to be a code word for regime change. It's about the domestic governing system of China versus the domestic governing system of, you know, in Europe or elsewhere. We spend some good time to seek clarification with our European colleagues, including via Zooms, but now it does seem to me increasingly it's getting clearer. So that speaks about need for further communication.

But arms control is a field of itself. At the end of the day, what determines the result of warfare after it gets started is not weapons, it's human will. Wars take place; they come and go. It's máo zhǔxí bǎ zhè yìdiǎn gǎo qīngchǔle. Chairman Mao got that right. It's human will. It's the human choice at some point of time. So arms control is a legitimate topic, it needs to be discussed, but it's a means to a larger end. And the larger end is how we learn to relate to each other and to use arms control as an instrument to reduce tension, rather than just arriving at some numerical parity and think that's a good indicator of a marker of peace of mind thereafter. There are going to be differences, whether or not that that might make, if it not properly managed, a rise to a decision to use arms. So arms control is yes, start talking, but then it must have an element of how and why you go to that decision of pushing that button and launch, and let's try to get ourselves to refrain from doing that. What did you say? There was something I thought you said.

**HASS:** She was talking about the tension between sovereignty and right to protect, and human rights.

**DAOJIONG:** I don't know. I think human rights are important. There's no doubt about it. Human rights in China and in any other countries are important. The R2P, the document where former Prime Minister [inaudible] participated in the wise men's group, later on were tested, first in Libya. You see, this is the whereby political scientists, many of them are better at it. You know, I learned English as a second language, and I learned political science as a very new subject. You have the difference-- some difference between inter-national relations and intra-national relations. Now, human rights, if you put it more as in the realm of intranational relations, in other words, each state, each governing entity does have that duty to protect human rights and enhance human rights protection. But then, yes, it's very internationally related. But if there was a Chinese reservation — I don't think it's China alone, by the way — it's that concerns about human rights, how is that better or more productively expressed? Better and productively, the measurement

being in terms of seeing actual improvement on the ground, the improvement to the group of individuals, especially minorities, women, or ethnic minorities or marginalized, you know. And then how, how can that be more effective than when you use trade sanctions as a means to say, "Fine, I sanctioned the regime and I sanction the elite, then they-- hopefully, they would turn around to change their behavior towards the poor and the marginalized." Or you think about other means of doing this. I haven't thought it through. And with R2P, especially in the beginning with the Libya experiment, I do believe there are lots, there's still a lot of room for discussing if military intervention in the-- for the goal would be really that effective or that conducive to reaching the goal of improving human rights on the ground.

**HASS:** Well, I think that's a fair point that it's worthy of further discussion. I'm not sure if we are going to find the answer today, but it is an important topic for us to continue, continue to contemplate.

**DAOJIONG:** That's a good excuse for getting us back to Brookings.

**HASS:** But I want to turn to another foundational question about the international system. Every year around the time of the U.N. General Assembly in September, there is a wave of articles and commentary suggesting that the international system is not fit for purpose, it is not solving the world's problems. I think that that feeling is exasperated by events in Ukraine as well as in Israel. And so I wanted to ask each of you whether or not you agree with that diagnosis that the international system is outdated, it's not addressing the most pressing problems in the world. And if so, what would you identify as the most pressing problems that that merits further focus and resources? Tara, can we start with you?

**VARMA:** Sure. I do, I mean, I think it's still up to date in the sense that we haven't found something really better, but we do need to reform it. And we've heard a number of voices now, actually, making themselves heard much more strongly about the fact that multilateralism is one country, one voice and that their voices should be heard more. One institution or one format that I'm thinking of is, of course, the U.N. Security Council that clearly is inherited from a period where the power balance was very different than it is now. And Europeans are among those saying, first of all, the European Security Council should be extended. We're thinking about a number of countries —Germany, India, Japan, amongst others who-- I mean, every country is important — that these countries at particularly on the international stage, they should be given this voice. There should be more nonpermanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

It's not that everything can happen in the U.N., but when you think of the international order, you need two main elements. First one is impartiality, and the second is a capacity to act collectively. And as of now, the United Nations is the only institution providing — well, at least supposed to provide — these two elements. And I think one of the things that Europeans are pushing a lot more for is actually to make it fit for purpose, to make the U.N. more representative of not just the power dynamics, but of the rights of everyone.

Because what we're looking at, I mean, we're looking at an increasing number of conflicts — I'm saying this as we speak, of course, with all the events in the war in Ukraine, and in Israel and Palestine — but we're also looking at a number of developmental issues that are not going away. The question of debt, the question of climate adaptation, mitigation, of course, development issues. All these, I mean, we have to find a way not to choose between all these topics, but to make sure that we address all of them and that we address all of them collectively. And so we're seeing also a number of what we call minilateral formats that G20, that G7 have been extremely active in providing some form of political impetus. We're, of course, seeing the BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We're seeing a number of formats emerging, which I think speak to the strength, actually, of multilateralism, but these minilateral formats they work because at one point they basically are attached to a larger international organization. And so we need both. It's not minilateralism against multilateralism. We need to do all of this together in the larger framework. And this is what the Europeans are pushing for as much as possible. They are a growing voice in the international system, not always fully coordinated, as you know, but I think they're trying to get there.

**DAOJIONG:** The U.N. is today, is in many ways, a victim of its own success. People often forget how tremendous the U.N. system-- under the U.N. system, humanity has progressed. If you look at the meteorology, if you look at health, if you look at food and agriculture, and you look at the Buenos Aires Plan of Action that led to a technology transfer and cooperation among developing countries. U.N. specialized agencies and their units have done tremendous jobs of, you know, connecting different parts of the world, especially what today is popular vocabulary, Global South, to be self-- more self-- should we say to generate more dynamism within their own societies rather than pounding the desk at the, you know, very beginning of the U.N. or the early origins of the so-called South-South cooperation movement was the demand concessions or demand compensation.

The U.N. is fit for purpose. I don't think they here-- of course, whose purpose? If you think about it, the purpose of the vast majority of the world, the U.N. quite fit. Now, if you measure that purpose by looking at peace, secu-- development, and human rights — or for that matter, justice — each of the three categories, there can be some disagreements. But then there is a lot of blame on the U.N. system that — especially, you know, Security Council resolutions, or the debates in terms of Article 5, right, authorization of force to exercise, the principle of collective security — but then the end of the day, you think, why do two parties go to war? Who's responsibility is it in the first place? Is it the responsibility of the two direct parties, or is it that of third-- third parties that somehow a group under the U.N. system? So, I would think there is more to look at, you know, the U.N. system just by going, by going beyond the U.N. as a mechanism per se. If you look at in Asia, there is an organization that sometimes is wrongly — let me emphasize, wrongly — laughed at as a



talking shop. It functions like the U.N. where it's worked miracles, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN. ASEAN members have tremendous difficulty-- I mean, differences — their memories of history, their border disputes, A, B, C and D, [a] long list — but they routinize themselves into interactions regardless of all these large differences.

What's the deliverable? The deliverable for the region is nobody within ASEAN is talking about war as the choice to resolve those differences. And you-- further on, you can look at the ASEAN centrality or the ASEAN plus China, ASEAN plus Japan, or even that ASEAN actually helped to have a Japan-China-South Korea grouping, got ten plus three. There are a lot of things and there are many other regional efforts. So, no, I profoundly disagree with statements saying the U.N. is not fit. It quite fit. It's how, you know, different members actually make use of it. And rather than simply outsource the blame to say, "Ah, it's all the U.N.'s fault." No, it's not. Sorry.

**HASS:** Susan, what do you think?

**THORNTON:** I said, you know, that I think the U.N.'s done a lot in its history to uphold, you know, peace and stability and promote prosperity, and that we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater, but there are some areas where we need to do some work. You know, we've got not enough capital flowing to the developing world from the developed world. We've got huge transnational problems that are new and that we haven't really had so much on the global scale in the past. Pandemics, the cooperation on the pandemic was abysmal, and that is a-- should be taken as a point of departure for future lessons and maybe even coming up with an improved or a better organization to work on these things. Climate change has-- is an existential threat to all of us. If we don't do something about that, and it has to be done by the whole world, there's no point in talking to any-- about any of the rest of it. You know, I think certainly the failure to prevent outbreaks of conflict, you know, we've seen that over the years. But again, if you look at the other side of the coin, interstate — your use of your phrase — conflict has been, has been really... you can count the examples on one hand. So I think, you know, the collapse of empires, decolonization, all of these things are wrenching change, and the U.N. has done an amazing job.

New technologies are gonna be another existential threat that we really are not set up at all to grapple with. I mean, I do think minilateral formats are-- can be useful. It's criticized as a talk shop. It's 193 what plus members at this point. It's very hard to generate consensus. It's slow and ponderous. There's a lot of administrative aspects to it that bother people. But as you say, I mean, talking is the way we stabilize, the way we prevent conflicts from breaking out, the way we improve understanding, trite as that may sound. So I think there are reforms that need to be made. There may be things that need to be added and addressed more effectively. You know, one of the things I would say about-- just to answer the criticism

about, you know, not enough democracy in the international system, I mean, we all know that people are talking about the U.S. But I mean, I have to say, whenever there's a fire alarm ringing somewhere in the world, you know, where do people come running? So there's a little bit of a chicken and egg problem here, and we've worked really hard with China to get China to answer the fire alarm in the past on some issues and not gotten a lot of response there. China tends to not want to stick its neck out and get involved in mediating disputes that are very thorny and are risky to try to get yourself in the middle of. And so, I mean, Europe, you know, we had the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. And so, you know, I mean, to some extent it's the U.S. is going to be the de facto leader of this international system for quite a long time into the future. but we do need to see other countries and other powers stepping up to contribute both ideas, but also resources, and action in some of these cases. And I think it's frustrating for those of us on the U.S. side to hear people constantly saying, you know, "The U.S. is always trying to tell people what to do," but then when you try to get other people to get involved, you just kind of come up empty a lot of the time. And I think we're working on that, I think we're trying to move in that direction, but that's another avenue of change that needs to happen.

**VARMA:** Just quickly on this point, I think Europeans are acutely aware of how central the U.S. is. In Europe's case, without, without the U.S., there is no European security. And so we do look at inconsi-- inconsistencies or changes in the U.S. government, actually, as very important, sometimes existential to us. And we know that if the U.S. decides to withdraw partially or fully from a number of regions, this will affect us directly. And so I do think that when we're talking about a liberal order, we need to think about how the word liberal is also perceived. We-- you know, there are criticism about the fact that it has variable geometry that we're-- some of the criticism about double standards that we have. Some issues we feel very strongly about, and we decide that the international system should support us, other issues somehow we don't feel so strongly about because they're not on our top priority lists. And so we get called on by not just rivals, but also partners in what could be considered as inconsistencies. And so I do, I do want to say this because it is important, and so this is why the multilateral order is so central to the Europeans because it is one country, one voice, and it defense principles, human rights. It's not just about values, but it's about actual international law principles, something that I-- we can get a majority of countries to agree on.

**HASS:** So there are experts in the United States who have identified sort of cardinal pillars of the international system, and these include arms limitation, human rights, freedom of navigation, and territorial integrity. If you look at those four cornerstones of the international system, the United States and China have somewhat different views on each of them, or maybe you disagree. But based upon that, is it possible, is it reasonable to expect that the United States and China will be able to comfortably continue living under the

umbrella of the international system as it is currently configured? Professor Zha, I think you may disagree, so I'd be curious to hear your thoughts.

**DAOJIONG:** I don't disagree. I'm an academic person. I speak my mind, my own mind.

**HASS:** Good.

**DAOJIONG:** Well, on territory integrity as a principle, there is no disagreement whatsoever. But then disagreement comes over what, you know, is the accepted borderlines. I don't think we-- this was the time to begin talking about specific situations. Everybody knows what I'm referring to, right? For us over there in China, they see that — I would invite especially audiences here in the U.S. to appreciate — is that China has some 14, or by some other standards, even more than that, nation-states as neighbors bordering land. And there are still, you know, land border demarcation or even drawing the line disputes, and they were using different records of history even within the country, especially if you look at China and India, right? The national government scholars in Beijing they may be referring-- having one version of what the border should be like, but then in the Tibetan region, and there are different accounts of what are the border was like and recorded even to our own system in different languages, that makes the negotiations or shaping of opinion much more complex. So territory integrity is a very, you know, very important. I mean, it's the essential principle. But then it comes down to the the details of whose version of where the territorial line is. That's one point.

Human rights, I don't think the U.S. and China is really that different on the human rights as an issue. Like, I don't want to be repetitive. It's what another society can and should do in terms of affecting the real improvement of the rights situations of the people. And should you, you create one distant voice of a minority group or a protest group as representing the whole. Back in the Cultural Revolution years, you know, China, I'm talking about the 1960s. China used to parade one protest leader of the United States after another, one of those parades in China is probably peculiar to us. Here in the U.S., nobody gained much attention. That was, if you use Chinese vocabulary, it probably that could be viewed what we did then as interve-- intervention in domestic affairs, all though the civil rights movement in the U.S. were real. And for China to take a stance, was it helpful or not helpful? I think you got to my point. What's the fourth one? You named four, I forgot.

**HASS:** Freedom of navigation.

**DAOJIONG:** Ah, Freedom of navigation, freedom of navigation.

**HASS:** Arms limitation, human rights, territorial integrity.

**DAOJIONG:** Commercial freedom of navigation is not a problem at all. But it's when the freedom of navigation missions conducted, I see a risk of freedom of navigation missions being a precursor to a kind of

justification for arms build-up, especially naval forces, just for the sake of it. And it's sort of, should we say, you can call it emotive response. You know, there are issues of international law, there are issues of norms or, or the systems, like the-- what I said, emotive. You know, what I don't want to see is somehow in China or in other parts of the world, you would have that sentiment, fine, let's someday, let's take the U.S. as an example because it has built the-- it has the naval capacities to conduct those missions in waters close, close to the land mass of China. Why don't we do the same to the United States? We build naval forces. Do a few of those rounds, let's say, off the coast of Maine? What's the closest coast here?

**THORNTON:** Hawaii.

**DAOJIONG:** Hawaii would be... nobody cares.

**HASS:** I have relatives who live in Alaska.

**DAOJIONG:** Oh, Alaska.

**HASS:** And there have been Chinese vessels near Alaska.

**DAOJIONG:** And I see that as this as a sign of, you know, conflict, conflict promotion for the sake of it. It's not really that conducive at all. So those things need to be more thoroughly discussed, and effective communication ought to take place more frequently.

**HASS:** Susan?

**THORNTON:** So, I'm interested in what you said about conflict promotion for the sake of it. I mean, I do think the differences are-- tend to be focused on and exaggerated, particularly in our current information environment, and against the backdrop of politics and, you know, the strategic competition, and all of the talk about that. I think I'm not sure I would agree with these four pillars being named, but, for example, look at the issue of kind of open commerce, open trade, open capital flows. The U.S. and China have differences on some of these things. Some related to the level of development, some related to different ways of, of-- or sort of probably philosophical visions of how to run an economy. But for the most part, you know, we have a lot of commonalities now on this issue. A lot more than we used to have. And I think free commerce and free navigation, there are specific differences about interpretations of UNCLOS, etcetera. Actually, one difference is that China can be taken to an arbitral tribunal under UNCLOS because it's a signatory to the treaty and the U.S. cannot be taken to an arbitral tribunal under UNCLOS.

But I think mainly what I want to say is that the international system was set up to impose constraints on major powers in particular, but on all powers, but particularly major powers. And you know, the U.S. and China both bridle at these constraints, and we are both very attached to our sovereignty, we both consider ourselves to be exceptional countries, we have, you know, a certain vision of our place in the world and what our ambition is. And so it's, it's gonna be difficult within one system to put these two countries together and

have them cohabit. But we have to do it, we don't have a choice. You know, a U.S.-China conflict would be an, an extinction event — as they call it now with AI — I mean, I think it would be an extinction event. So we have to prevent it, we have to cohabit, coexist, whatever word you want to use. And so, you know, there is a lot more commonality. And I think the main thing we should focus on is what is the sort of ethos of responsibility for both our own citizens and for the welfare of the greater global community within our two governments and systems. And then, you know, within that, you can find a lot of areas of commonality. I don't think China's ready to be a leader of the international system — you might have a different view — but I think it's going to be the U.S. for the foreseeable future based on my experience trying to get China to do more. And so, you know, how is that going to look and how are we going to bring in the multilateral system? And I agree it's a multipolar world, we're just moving there, you know, in different vectors, fits, and starts, but other countries have to come in. How does that look? That change has to happen, but, you know, we don't have a choice. We have to, we have to find a way to coexist, and I think it will be a mistake not to do it within one global international community because of the salience of those other extinction-type events that I mentioned that need actually probably to be addressed on a much more urgent basis than they're being tackled now.

**HASS:** Okay, so I have a final question for each of you before we turn the floor over to our our guests. And that is-- there's a lot of discussion right now about potential bifurcation or fragmentation of the international system. And so looking ahead 20 or 30 years, when my daughter or son is sitting in my chair asking the same question, will there be a singular international system that resembles what we have today or not? Tara, can we start with you?

**VARMA:** Sure. Fragmentation is something that Europeans are very worried about. The president of my country, Emmanuel Macron, actually has been giving a lot of speeches about it. the idea that we need to fight against the logic of blocks and not go back to a Cold War-era thinking that we need to absolutely make sure, but we need to be clear about divergences, differences that we have. That's also what the international system is about. But once we've acknowledged them, make sure that we settle these discussions and differences globally, together. And so the idea that actually Europeans are here not to provide a third way, but they're here to provide an additional option to whoever actually, countries want to work with them — whether it's the U.S., China, a number of countries from the so-called Global South, a number of countries in Africa and Asia —and this idea is that it's not just an alternative to the U.S. and China, all these options can be cumulative. And so the idea that there are several options out there, this doesn't-- you could think that actually, it plays maybe into this fragmentation, but I think if we're dealing with this. again, collectively in the international order, this is the role that Europeans are supposed to play. First of all, they're supposed to take

their own role seriously on the international stage. The strategic awakening that the Europeans have been going through is honestly, fairly recent. Europeans are still very reluctant to acknowledge themselves, to think of themselves as a global power, as a geopolitical power. It's an ambition of the European Commission. But this is the idea that we would think geopolitically, goes completely contrary to how the European Union was set up. So we're overcoming our own difficulties here. But we have a huge tool, which is the single market in the EU, which is our strongest tool, and that we need to strengthen, and we need to use it actually in a more geopolitical way. So we're thinking about how we provide options to a number of countries in the, in the international stage on the multilateral level. This is exactly what the Europeans want to do at a time where they are scared of an increased fragmentation of the world.

**DAOJIONG:** I would think 20 years down the road, we quite likely are going to have a continuation of the current international system, there will be modifications. The temptation, especially in rhetoric, and mind you, Chinese-American or Chinese-European for that matter, whatever-- however you pair that rhetoric, there are a lot of echo chamber effect translating back and forth. You may have that temptation of saying, "Let's have a bifurcated world" and "Let's have, you know, in reality doing things to create a new set, separate sets of systems." Although, you know. How successful can that be? If you look at-- you won't need followers to do that, right? One recent example in at least in the past year or past few months is a number of those countries that were considered pivotal or strategic-- strategically important, they chose to join projects, you know, both provided by the G20 framework or G7 framework and the BRICS framework, or for that matter, the Belt and Road. So the notion that of bifurcation being a viable choice sort of assumes that you'll have third parties or fourth parties that just so willingly and so-- to follow that kind of so-called leadership. And they would not-- they were not capable of hedging what they don't think about. The hedging, that probably makes more strategic sense. They're short of choices.

I think that assumption is just not true. And following that kind of assumption would actually lose-- help, you know, the party that drives-- tries to get a third party, say, you know, "Follow me, not him." It's actually a way of losing support around the world. The, with, just one word some of our students talked about referenced to the democratization of the international system. That rhetoric needs to be examined. If you look at the Chinese political philosophy going back to the Sūn Zhōng Shān reference to tiān xià dà tóng, all nations are equal. To Mao, to Chairman Mao's reference to the Chinese-- China and the Chinese people should make a contribution to mankind. They generally use a sort of "duì rénlèi zuòchū gòngxiàn." And to what we say today, our leaders say today as "rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngtǐ" wrongly translated the shared future, I think it's the common future for mankind. It's not really that it's quite consistent. In other words, it's, you know, going round and round probably to say the same meaning about cohabitation. In the-- I, if I can go

back a little bit to what I said earlier on, it's probably if there is a consistent Chinese position on this that stands the test of time, it's evaluation of intra-national relationship. And then on that basis, say let's work internationally and see how we can ameliorate our differences. Differences are always going to be there.

**HASS:** Thank you, thank you.

**DAOJIONG:** Sorry.

**HASS:** Yeah. No, it's fantastic. I just want to make sure that we have an opportunity to bring our audience in. And Susan, you've already sort of briefly commented on this before, that we don't have a choice, we must find a way to cohabit, so we will let that stand. The floor is now open to questions. If we could start with Nicolas. You have a microphone, it's on its way to you.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thank you, Ryan, and thank you to the panelists--. All right, okay, this one work better. All right, I come from the human rights world. I work at Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. So normally I'm the idealist in the room, but today I find myself a little bit in the other camp. We know that the international system is not fit for purpose, but we also know that this is the nature of institutions. They are sticky, they outlive the conditions of their creation, and they decay, and they have problems. But the real question is, are the participants of the system willing to cooperate to reform the institutions? And I'd like to know whether you see any inkling of that cooperation.

All the big parties have different problems and interest and trajectories. The U.S. has an enormous domestic problem, clearly, that could change everything. The West is generally losing power relatively to the rest of the world. The EU has a problem because it has not the material means for its security, which is a problem in a more and more brutal world. And China has a problem in terms of reforming the international order, which is, I think Susan alluded to it, it's not clear they really want these responsibilities. It seems to me they don't really have the capacity to do it. And with the war on Ukraine, the vision that China now promotes is a vision of reduced and conditional territorial sovereignty. This is territorial sovereignty but not if some other parties have legitimate security interests, or probably more accurately translated as reasonable security concerns, which is, you know, what is this if my territorial security is guaranteed but could be waived for some vague principle? That, that is pretty worrying, and I don't see any member of the international community saying, "Well, I'm going to leave the U.N. charter and international law to join this function."

So my question really is, you know, a lot of what we attribute to China seems to be more on the realm of a quest for status than a quest for actual, you know, managerial responsibilities of the internal national system. The real question I have is what would-- so what we can expect is more decay of the institution and a fragmented order, basically, unless there is, you know, a real willingness from the different parties to cooperate despite having different problems and options. What would it take for these different

parties, U.S., EU, and China, to really cooperate to reform the international order? And what result could we expect aside from degrading the system to the lowest common denominator?

**HASS:** Okay. So I'm going to give each of you a couple of sentences to respond to this so that we can bring in another question. I tried to leave us on the optimistic note about the continuity of the international system, but we must deal with the fact that there is risk of decay as well. So, Susan and then John and Tara.

**THORNTON:** You know, what resonates about what you said with me is that everyone says that we need to do this, that, and the other thing, you know. We need to tackle climate change, we need to improve the institutions for pandemics, we need to fix the World Bank. But, you know, everyone's got different ideas about how to do that and no one wants to pay. So really, at the end of the day, the international system is about resources. It's about global public goods and who's gonna pay for them. And we have more and more needs and we have more and more reticence about paying. And how are we going to, in the rich countries, you know, figure out how to deal with some of this? I mean, China is now the number two U.N. dues-payer in the system. So in that respect, we do see some stepping up, but we need to see a lot more. And if-- what we're talking about basically is complaints from — and I don't like the term Global South, but I'll use it here — complaints from countries that have been neglected in the interest that the international system was established for, which is, which is, again, protection of stability and peace, and promotion of development and prosperity, and sort of in a sustainable way that takes into account kind of a more global community. And I think they're frustrated. I think, you know, all the major powers are also frustrated, but they-- you know, we don't want to give up our privileges in the system either. So, I mean, that, I think, is why you have to see better cooperation among those major powers. And now with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that's gone in the wrong direction.

So, you know, you're right to be skeptical, but we don't have anything better. I think young people really want to see this global institution working. They see the problems and they're frustrated. And I think that's true for young people around the world, not just, you know, in developed or developing countries. So we have to do better. And, you know, I don't think that the direction we've gone in the U.S.-China relationship is gonna make this any easier, so maybe step one is we've got to figure out how to get that back on track. And I do think, you know, talking is important and engagement is important, and we see kind of some engagement now getting back on track between the U.S. and China. Whether that can go far enough to bring us to some point of cooperation to fix the international system — you know, it should. But will it? We don't know yet.

**THORNTON:** Professor Zha?



**DAOJIONG:** In the interest of time, I'll be very brief. To my knowledge, the Chinese government agencies, especially the foreign ministry, came out with various positions on the Russia-Ukraine and other situations. But then at the end of the day, for China to play a role, it needs to have a buy-in on the direct parties involved in the conflict. In the case of the Iran-Saudi Arabia situation, you know, China tried to play the role, how it turned out to be the way it was, it's because of the buy-in. And then, that's one point. The second quick point here that you need to bear in mind that when you talk about China, you can't just be so abstract. How the international system comes to today, the ideas, the laws, the philosophies, the practices, and the accumulation of unwritten expertise dates back to World War One or even before that. For today's China, you know, Chinese diplomats, Chinese scholars, Chinese leaders, you know, I've studied I came to the U.S. back first in the 1980s. As a collective, there is that absence of participation. So naturally, I would say, it's not really by design. You know, we would-- you would have a representative of a Chinese person, you know, at a table, U.N. or U.S., but collectively, we don't have that kind of co-- and much richer collective memory of how the international system has evolved. So that's--.

**HASS:** Thank you.

**DAOJIONG:** We have to be a little more patient.

**HASS:** So final word is to you.

**VARMA:** I think Europeans are worried about the low-cost international order that we've been describing right now. And I do think that actually it shouldn't be just about cohabitation coexistence, but it should be about coexistence in the very long-term, and so they need to tackle a number of the global issues we've mentioned, China and Russia are fundamentally opposed to U.N. Security Council reform. And actually, I don't like the word-- the expression "Global South" either, but I do think all the countries of the Global South and beyond have a lot of agency, and it's much harder for China and Russia basically to say no to them. If a number of these countries go to China and Russia and ask for more representation in the international system, it does break the narrative that it's the West against the rest, particularly since the war in Ukraine. So I would actually call on a number of these emerging countries to ask China and Russia to be part of this international system and to have their rightful place in it.

**HASS:** So that concludes our time, unfortunately. This hour went by faster than I wanted to. I have many more questions to ask. It just means we're going to have to return to this conversation in the future. But the key thing that I left with is that the current international system does seem to cohere to the interest of a European perspective, a Chinese perspective, and an American perspective. But there are real impediments to addressing the shortcomings of problems that are going to need to be addressed. And in the absence of that, the risk of decay in the system is real. So thank you to our panelists for providing the expertise.

