

DEBATE

Meir Sheetrit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel

I would like to ask Wang Jisi about the problems that China is facing as it confronts the large growth in immigration from the rural areas to the big cities. As you know, there is [inaudible] that says that people want, first of all, to have security and then food and then education. When they have education they then want to have influence and to participate in making decisions about the future. I believe that this process is going on in China now. Where do you stand on this? As you said, you are confronting a lot of local problems in China and I believe that a lot of people in China now have better education and are more involved and they would like to be more democratic in making decisions in the future. How do you see it?

Anil Razdan, Former Power Secretary of India

We appreciate that China wants to move along the economic growth path and that there is a lot of internal work that needs to be done. China likes a lot of Western values, as we have seen for almost two decades, with changing lifestyles and attire and the need for Western cars and so on. However, when will China embrace democracy?

Narendra Taneja, Founder President of the World Energy Policy Summit

I am trying to buy what our friend from China is trying to explain, but when you look at the reality on the ground China has a problem with every one of its neighbours, from Japan to India and countries in Central Asia and Vietnam and there are now even going to be new problems emerging with Burma. I am trying to buy what you are saying in terms of being on the way to becoming a kind of benign superpower, but how come every single country in your neighbourhood does not seem to understand that?

Wang Jisi, Dean of the School of International Studies, Peking University, and director of the Center for International and Strategic Studies, Peking University

I think that China will become more democratic, but the definition of democracy is somewhat different from the Western world. Checks and balances are necessary and popular voting may happen later on. We should not avoid discussing democracy and freedom and these are all recorded in China's latest official documents, including the speeches of top leaders. We will therefore wait to see what will happen in the next few years.

As regards China's problems with its neighbours, I think that the blunt answer from many people in China would be that these countries are being taken advantage of by the United States and that the United States is trying to create more trouble between China and its neighbours and drive a wedge between them. Personally, I have different opinions on this, although I do not agree with the comment that China has a problem with every single neighbour. I think that the situation is much more complicated than that. China still maintains good relations with many neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Central Asian states, Russia, and Cambodia. I believe that in the future China will try very hard to improve relations with all neighbouring countries, including even Japan, but it also needs other countries to cooperate with China in solving these territorial disputes. One phenomenon that I brought to your attention is that rhetorically you will hear even more aggressive words in the official media and social media, but in reality China's actions are very modest and it remains quite pragmatic in dealing with all the neighbouring countries.

Han Sung-Joo, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

In the spirit of fairness, I will ask Robert a question. When he was writing his book on China Henry Kissinger emphasised that both China and the United States indulge in or suffer from exceptionalism and he defines American exceptionalism as a Messianic exceptionalism and Chinese exceptionalism as a cultural exceptionalism. In the case of China, I think that this is being expressed now more in terms of nationalism. How do you think this kind of



exceptionalism in both countries, particularly the United States, plays out in the bilateral relations between the two countries?

Robert Blackwill, Henry A. Kissinger senior fellow for U.S. foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

That is a terrific question and my crystal ball is inevitably quite clouded, but I would like to say this. In my presentation, I mentioned that the United States would be preoccupied with its domestic economic challenges. If you add to that we are exiting two 10-year wars, neither of which went all that well – if I may use irony of understatement – I think that the American people are not looking for a Messianic mission, at least not for the foreseeable future. On the contrary, they think – and I believe that American strategists mainly agree with this – that unless we get our domestic economic house in order, especially our debt, then over time our power projection will erode so much that we will not be able to maintain the framework of alliances and power projection that basically kept the peace for many decades.

As for the US – and I think that this is acutely true of the Obama administration – I am quite confident that none of these new people – and we will have to see whom his appointments are – are looking for a confrontation with China. My own view is – although Jisi would be definitive on this - that for the reasons that I set out I do not believe that, whatever cultural Messianic instincts that China might have, intrinsically the new Chinese leadership is looking for a confrontation with the Americans. However, having said that, I will conclude by saying that this is all quite delicate. The quality of diplomacy that will be required to keep this on a more or less equilibrrious balance is not trivial. Whatever advice that our friends in the room here can give the two sides might not always be welcome in Washington, but it will always be useful as the number one and the number two seek to keep their relationship within boundaries that promote every other nation's peace, prosperity and security.

Han Sung-Joo, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Thank you. I think that, to the extent that we can draw a conclusion from this session, the G2 is out, with or without a question mark. However, the relationship between China and the United States is likely to remain pragmatic and we hope constructive rather than destructive.