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I feel privileged to be included in this debate, all the more so since Asia as a Continent is possibly wracked by the largest numbers of rivalries. Apart from the rivalry between the US and China today, there are several others in Asia, some of which are of an even longer duration. Afghanistan is the most recent. Lessons learnt from these conflicts are relevant to all nations across the world.

Coming to the current Sino-US rivalry, it has admittedly more far reaching consequences than the India-Pakistan rivalry, which has been around for a much longer duration. India erred in believing that the differences that had plagued Sino-Indian relations for many years had plateaued in recent decades, even though the tensions across the several thousand kilometers Sino-Indian land border in the Himalayas remained. The flare up in recent months - following China's unprovoked aggression in the Galwan heights in Ladakh - has put paid to any such beliefs. It is obvious that China would never allow any of its neighbours to live in peace. What is also clearly evident is that China wishes to initially establish its dominance over Asia, before proceeding to dominate the rest of the world. Checkmating China's expansionist ambitions is, hence, crucial not only for the future of Asia, but for the future of the world.

Francis Fukuyama's warning that the new global threat comes not from Islamist terror, but from China, is here, most relevant. It is a warning that should be heeded. Any talk of Sino-American rivalry, must factor this warning into the calculations.

Asia, by itself, may not be able to withstand China. As we saw in Afghanistan, sustained Western involvement is important, and needed, to protect democratic traditions across many parts of Asia. India is, perhaps, the only country in the region that has a capacity to stand up to China. Meantime, China through its Belt Road Initiative - which highlights economic and other developmental initiatives but masks its strategic intentions - is making inroads across Asia. Many Asian countries have been taken in by their propaganda, overlooking China's long-term objective.

The moot point here is whether the US is really keen to checkmate China's expansionist ambitions, and is willing to go the whole way to do so. Asian countries would also want to know whether they can depend on the US to 'bite the bullet and walk the talk', so that there is no repetition of what took place in the late 20th Century, including Vietnam, and what has taken place in Afghanistan just a few weeks ago. In the past, while the US has often talked



about checkmating China – there was talk of the US pivot to Asia towards the end of the 20th Century, for instance – with each change in US Administration, its attitudes, perceptions and objectives seemed to change. In course of time, the US has receded in many areas, while China has kept expanding its power.

Talk of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the US, India, Japan and Australia) and AUKUS (Australia, the US and the UK) in Asia, alongside the other QUAD in West Asia (the US, the UAE, Israel and India), is interesting, but they have to prove that they can, or are willing, to hold China back as is the purported objective of these alliances. If the US does not carry out its part of the bargain, then the Chinese will have everything going their way. What is urgently needed, hence, is for Governments across the Free World to come together to prevent Chinese expansionism, which today casts the biggest shadow over Asia.

One final point. As a long-term student of Chinese affairs, I venture to add that China under Xi Jinping does seem in some ways to mirror China under Mao during 1958-59. There are again indications today of inner tensions plaguing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and these could turn out to be more problematic than the current rivalry and conflict between China and the US. I make bold to affirm that if ways and means could be found to exacerbate the inner pressures and tensions to widen the fault lines within the CCP, these may prove to be far more effective, than engaging in an open conflict with China.

Thomas Gomart, Director of Ifri

Thank you very much for your presentation and for reminding us that the rivalry between the US and China is not the only one in Asia, plus what you have said about the US and maybe expecting more cautious US behavior in the future.